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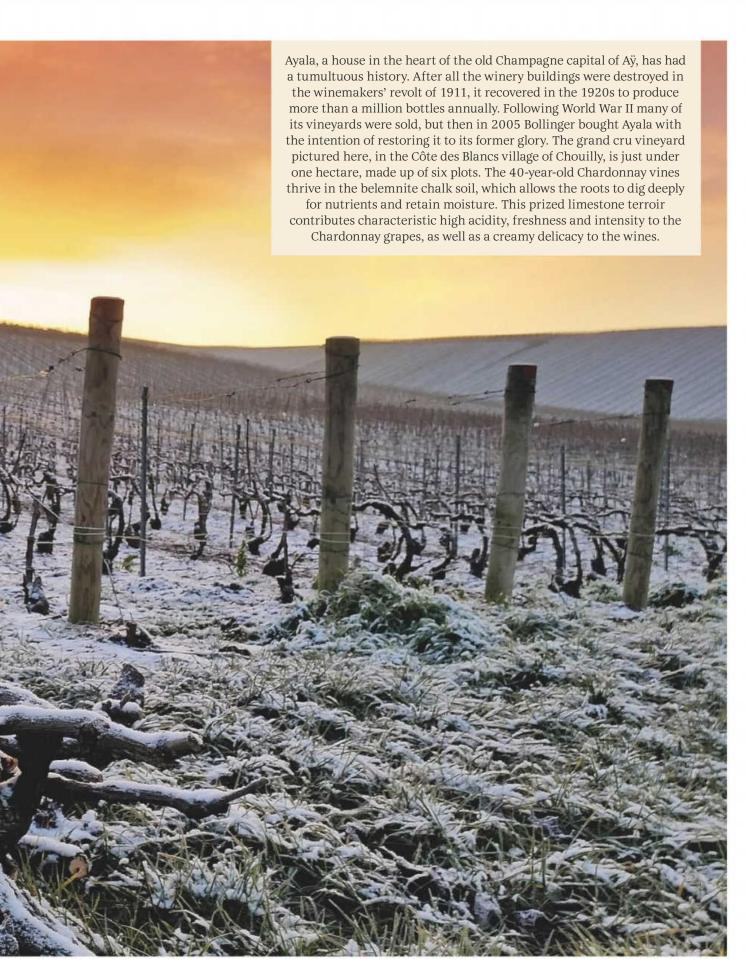
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## The joy of terroir



## Ayala, Chouilly, Champagne











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# John Stimpfig 'Alas, it's not all Krug

and Comtes – such indulgence does have a price'

BELIEVE IT OR not, I do occasionally question why I buy so much Champagne. Mostly, this worrisome introspection occurs when my wife is scrutinising our bank statements. When actually drinking the stuff, any fleeting financial concerns disappear as quickly as the first glass is emptied.

So yes, dear reader, I admit that I have a bit of a Champagne habit. Suffice to say, it is much worse (better?) at this time of year because, chez moi, Christmas and New Year cry out for Reims' and Epernay's finest. Like the much quoted Winston Churchill (another addict, I hasten to add), I am easily satisfied with the best.

While sparkling wines from California (Roederer Estate), England (Nyetimber, Ridgeview, Gusborne), Italy (Ferrari) and New Zealand (Nautilus) will be consumed, the lion's share will inevitably be Champagne. Above all, Christmas day will most definitely include a proper treat in the form of a glorious prestige cuvée. The same goes for New Year's eve. Alas, it's not all Krug and Comtes – such indulgence does come at a price. So how do I square the circle of drinking well but not paying a king's ransom for the pleasure? The obvious answer is to box clever.

Firstly, mix and match: have the occasional vintage and prestige cuvée, but also open some well-chosen cheaper Champagnes and sparkling wines. If it's a party, pour NV or a good Prosecco. For bucks fizz, I use entry level cava.

Buy smart. In particular, take full advantage of the retail Champagne price war that is about to break out on the high street. It does strike me as bizarre that just as demand for Champagne goes through the roof, supermarket prices plummet through the floor. My advice is to fill your boots with the best deals. For information on who is doing what and when, keep a watchful eye on *Decanter.com*.

Another source of value are the grower Champagnes. They provide fabulous quality and individuality, and they often come at significantly lower prices than the big brands. Also look for vintages that are drinking well and come with less of a premium (see p42).

Lastly, stock up in advance. Well-kept Champagne ages beautifully and even non-vintage Champagne benefits from a bit of extra age in the bottle. Moreover, January is the start of the wine sale season for many independent merchants. I for one will be logging on and replenishing stocks for next year's festive season – and hopefully saving a small fortune. At least, that's what I'll be telling Mrs S. D

John Stimpfig is content director of Decanter



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# Amonth in wine

All the important issues affecting you across the globe, compiled by Richard Woodard

# Money pledged to Paris attack victims after record Hospices de Beaune sale

FRANCE Glowing reviews of Burgundy's 2015 vintage helped the annual Hospices de Beaune auction achieve a record €11.35m (£8m), but the atmosphere was marked by sadness following the Paris terror attacks. Organisers and individuals pledged money to help victims.

The 15 November auction achieved sales of €11,347,609, fees included, beating the previous record set last year by 39%. Early reports of a very promising 2015 vintage helped to generate enthusiasm among buyers.

But there was a subdued atmosphere in the wake of the Paris terror attacks on 13 November, less than 48 hours before the sale began in which 129 people were killed and 352 injured.

Organisers had earlier decided to press ahead with the sale, which opened with a one-minute silence and then a sombre rendition of the French national anthem *La Marseillaise*.

A third of the proceeds from the top lot, the Pièce des Presidents, will go to France's national federation for



victims of attacks and catastrophes, which will help support Paris victims, organisers announced.

And the American branch of the Chevaliers du Tastevin society said it would donate €45,000 (£32,000) to Paris victims and their families.

'It was necessary to maintain the auction; it is our only way of fighting and continuing with life,' said auction co-president Claire Chazal.

This year's Hospices de Beaune auction included 458 barrels of red wine and 117 of white.

The 228-litre Pièce des Presidents,

a barrel of red Corton from the Renardes grand cru, sold for a record €480,000 (£339,713) to an anonymous French philanthropist.

Compared to 2014, sales for the white wines increased by nearly 38% and sales for the reds by just over 39%.

Négociants bought up about 60% of the barrels and the rest were acquired by private buyers.

Auction bids came from Europe (76%), Asia (19%) and the US (5%). The auction also set a record for the most expensive barrel ever sold – Cuvée Cyrot-Chaudron, Clos de la Roche Grand Cru, Morey-St-Denis for €117,700 (£83,300).

Proceeds from the sale of the presidents' barrel were divided three ways because of the terror attacks in Paris: two-thirds for the originally intended beneficiaries (Institut Curie, a cancer research charity, and the AVC Foundation, which researches strokes) and one-third to victim support group La Fédération Nationale des Victimes d'Attentats et d'Accidents Collectifs.

#### Liger-Belair and Faiveley boost grand cru wines

**FRANCE** Two leading Burgundy producers have increased their grand cru production.

Domaine Faiveley has bought a 0.1ha piece of the Musigny grand cru to add to its existing 0.03ha. Even with these extra vines, its holding will remain the smallest parcel of this rare 25ha vineyard. Only about 500 bottles will be made annually.

The Faiveley family bought the plot from the Dufouleurs, another 'old, established house' in Nuits-St-Georges, Eve Faiveley told *Decanter.com* 

Meanwhile, Domaine du Comte Liger-Belair is adding a Clos Vougeot grand cru wine to its output from the 2015 harvest.

Louis-Michel Liger-Belair, who represents the seventh generation of the Liger-Belair family to make wine



in the region, is renting a 0.7ha plot of organically farmed vines. This should produce about 900 bottles of wine, starting with the 2015 harvest.

The Liger-Belair family was one of five producers to own the 50ha Clos Vougeot grand cru in the 19th and early 20th centuries, before the vineyard was further divided and sold off over the following decades. The clos now has about 80 owners.

Liger-Belair, based in Vosne-Romanée, now makes wine from 12 appellations, including the Echezeaux grand cru and La Romanée monopole, the smallest AC in France at 0.8452ha.

The rental agreement was for an initial 10-year period 'and we have already begun applying the biodynamic treatments that we use across our vines,' Louis-Michel Liger-Belair told *Decanter.com.* ➤

## A month in wine

#### Around the wine world

Italy set to overtake France as world's biggest producer

**ITALY** The International Organisation for Vine and Wine has predicted that Italy will topple France to reclaim top spot in global production, with the 2015 harvest set to produce 48.9 million hectolitres - or 6.5 billion bottles.

That's 10% more than Italy produced in 2014, and is the result of better weather conditions across the country, particularly in northern regions such as Piedmont.

Meanwhile, France is set to produce about 47.4 million hectolitres (roughly 6.3 billion bottles) - 1% more than in 2014.

Spain will remain the world's third largest wine-producing country in 2015, with an estimated production level of 36.6 million hectolitres or 4.9 billion bottles, down 4% on 2014.

Outside Europe, Chile is expected to

see its wine production soar 23% to a new record of 12.9 million hectolitres (1.7 billion bottles). But Argentina is poised to see its production tumble by 12% in 2015 to 13.4 million hectolitres (1.79 billion bottles).

The US, which is the world's largest wine-consuming country, is set to remain the fourth largest producer, with an estimated 2015 production level of 22.1 million hectolitres (2.9 billion bottles), which is up 1% on 2014.

In a response to trends in their domestic markets, where wine consumption has slumped to an all-time low, France and Italy have spent the past few years trying to cut wine production but focus on quality for export markets.

The OIV said world wine production would rise 2% to 275.7m hectolitres in 2015.

#### In brief

- An unnamed fine wine collector has paid \$17,000 (£12,000) for a bottle of Château Lafite 1895 at retailer Le Clos in Dubai International Airport. Bordeaux wines from the 19th century rarely come up for sale - a bottle of Lafite 1895 fetched £6,670 (\$10,592 at the time) at Christie's in 2011, more than double its pre-sale high estimate of £2,500.
- Dubbed the 'world's wealthiest working actress' by Forbes this year, China's Vicky Zhao Wei has released wines in China from her St-Emilion grand cru. Zhao Wei bought Château Monlot in 2011 and has since acquired several other properties. She said the wines would range in price from CNY168 to CNY2,000 (£17.50-£210).
- The owner of Taylor's Port has re-acquired the Vintage House Hotel in the Douro Valley, 13 years after selling it. The Fladgate Partnership has also bought land near the hotel in Pinhão with a view to adding 30 extra rooms to its 43 rooms and suites. Taylor's established the Vintage House in 1998 and sold it four years later.
- Veuve Clicquot's chef de cave Dominique Demarville admits he's taking a risk in changing the blend of prestige cuvée La Grande Dame, but wants to showcase the elegance of Pinot Noir. The 2008 vintage, due for release in 2018, will be nearly 95% Pinot Noir, compared to 53% for the recently launched 2006.
- Wines from Lafite, Louis Roederer, Bonneau du Martray, Ridge Vineyards and Fonseca Port will feature in a gala dinner hosted by Decanter and London's Royal Opera House. Tickets for the event on 9 February cost £600 each. Contact Helena Price: +44 (0)20 7212 9469 or helena.price@roh.org.uk

Stay up to date with the latest wine news on Decanter.com, or follow us on Facebook or Twitter @Decanter





**SOUTH KOREA** Artist Lee Ufan has been commissioned to design the label for the 2013 vintage of Château Mouton Rothschild - the last vintage produced under the leadership of Baroness Philippine de Rothschild.

Ufan, born in a South Korean mountain village in 1936 and winner of numerous international awards, opted for a simple, purple-and-red mark above the estate logo.

Some of the world's greatest artists have designed Mouton vintages in an annual tradition which the Médoc first growth began in 1945, although its association with art stretches back to 1924, when Jean Carlu produced artwork for Baron Philippe de Rothschild. Baroness Philippine de Rothschild died at the age of 80 in August 2014.

#### Chanel buys St-Supéry



The undisclosed deal means that Chanel owners Alain and Gérard Wertheimer will add St-Supéry Estate Vineyards & Winery to wine interests including two Bordeaux properties - Margaux second growth Château Rauzan-Ségla and St-Emilion classed growth Château Canon.

Robert Skalli established St-Supéry in 1985, three years after acquiring more than 607ha of land in the Napa Valley. The sale comes four years after Skalli sold Skalli Wines' brands, vineyards and facilities in Provence and the Rhône Valley to Boisset.

#### Beaujolais to map climats

FRANCE The 10 crus of Beaujolais are seeking to emulate Burgundy by identifying individual climats in an effort to link the vineyards more closely to their terroir.

Following a four-year study of all 10 crus, published as a series of maps in 2014, working groups have been set up to investigate and list climats by June 2016.

Audrey Charton, president of the management body ODG des Crus du Beaujolais, said the move was a first step towards asking for recognition of premier cru sites in the region, via a submission to the French authorities next year.

'Each appellation has its own terroir and typicity, and our job now is to record their complexity,' she said.





the family vineyard at Dixons Creek in the cool climate Yarra Valley region of Australia. Considered sustainable viticulture and low intervention winemaking produce wines with detail, purity and a sense of place - Steve Webber, Winemaker.

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# Letters

**Enraged or inspired by what you've read?** Email editor@decanter.com, or write to: The Editor, *Decanter*, Blue Fin Building, 110 Southwark Street, London SE1 OSU, UK

#### When wine tastes best

I WAS INTERESTED to read Gearoid Devaney's comment following the disappointing Marsannay panel tasting (December 2015 issue): 'It is worth noting that it was a root day in the biodynamic calendar when we tasted.'

I recently attended a tasting of Portuguese wines led by the owner of the estate. Impressed (as we all were) by her wines, she said: 'It must be a fruit day.' It was – but the comment passed most tasters by.

I am so convinced by the biodynamic wine calendar that I try to reserve my best bottles for fruit or flower days. It is said that some wine merchants/retailers also choose these days for their trade tastings. Is it time that *Decanter* put this theory to the test by tasting the same wines on biodynamic 'good' and 'bad' days?

David Lilley, by email

Christelle Guibert, tastings director, replies: We did carry out such an experiment some time ago, but didn't publish the results as they were inconclusive — and were complicated by the fact that the root day was sunny with blue skies, and the fruit day grey and overcast. It is an exercise that we are keen to repeat in the future.

Incidentally, readers will be glad to note that Christmas Day this year falls on a fruit day!

#### Ventoux legend

I ENJOYED MARY Dowey's excellent travel article on the Ventoux (November 2015), but she failed to mention one very important man. Serge Ghoukassian has twice been voted best sommelier of the year by French publications, owns Carpentras' best restaurant, Chez Serge, and is central to the increased success of the wines of Ventoux. (But thank you for the positive comments about my vineyard!)

Philippe Bieler, by email



#### Letter of the month

#### The perfect night in

I'VE FOUND THAT the best pairing for a mellow glass of the good stuff is a decent wine documentary or film. There is something about watching others toil over the vines and worry about weather patterns that adds a more complete understanding of how it came to nestle so snuggly within my glass.

I have enjoyed Oz Clarke and James May yomping around fantastic vine-growing spots in their *Big Wine Adventure*; the beautifully crafted *A Year in Burgundy* (recently followed by *A Year in Champagne*); as well as *Red Obsession*, the tale of Chinese interest in wine; and the tannic personalities in *Mondovino*. There's also the occasional film. *Jean de Florette* would just about qualify as a wine film; other, more obvious examples include the slightly corked story of the Judgment of Paris, *Bottle Shock*; romantic vineyard morality tale *A Good Year*; and the epic *Sideways*.

My regret is that there aren't enough in the genre to accompany the steady flow of wine in my household. Desperation has led to me choosing a film simply because it includes a scene where someone opens a bottle, orders a glass or gazes across vineyards. I wonder if any other wine-loving movie fans suffer this plight? And, if so, are there any further viewing recommendations?

Daniel Milne, Brighton, East Sussex



#### WIN A MAGNUM OF BOLLINGER

Wine is all about opinions, so why not share yours? If you are amused, enraged

or intrigued by anything you've read in *Decanter* or *Decanter.com*, write or email us at the address listed above

Each month the sender of our star letter will receive a magnum of Bollinger, courtesy of Mentzendorff, the house's UK agent (www.mentzendorff. co.uk)

Left: dealing with your bottle recycling – just one of the challenges of Christmas (see p74) Cherry Danish – and not a pastry AS A READER of *Decanter* from its very first issue, I am always on the lookout for new and exciting wines.

While on holiday in Denmark, my wife and I visited the Frederiksdal estate in Lolland, an island in Denmark's south. Here a wine is made which has been inspired by Banyuls, but instead of grapes it uses sour Danish (stevnsbaer) cherries. The high sugar, acidity and antioxidants in the cherries, from the family orchards, give unique nuances of flavour.

First we compared the effects of French and American oak on last year's wine. The German winemaker is also experimenting with a solera system and with rancio – leaving some wine outside year round, exposed to the elements.

At the moment the wines are only available in Denmark and a couple of places in Europe and China – more's the pity. They are rich and full bodied and the taste of cherries is never far from the palate, but in a savoury sense.

Unfortunately, the only ferry service between Denmark and the UK has been discontinued, so bringing home more than a bottle or two is impossible. I hope wine lovers in the UK and beyond will soon have the chance to discover these quality wines.

Ole Olsen, London



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# Andrew Jefford

'The most successful oaking is the least visible. In wine, never shout'

THE SEATING PLAN at *Decanter*'s 40th birthday lunch enabled me to share reflections with one of my favourite Argentinian producers: the unfailingly optimistic José Alberto Zuccardi. His smile was broader than ever; the glint in his eyes as bright as I remembered.

I told him how impressive the top
Argentinian reds I'd tasted at this year's
Decanter Asia Wine Awards had been: dense,
perfumed, succulent yet secondary, utterly
convincing. Together, we enjoyed the
soldierly, distinguished Château Montrose
1975 (from magnum), and we agreed that
Mendoza needed to produce wines which
could endure in that kind of way at some point
in the coming decades. But how? 'Andrew, we
are trying to do three things at present,' he
stressed. 'To use less oak, to avoid too much
richness and ripeness, and not to over-extract.'

Laudable aims, all, and on the pulse of the times; most serious red-wine producers would echo Zuccardi in some way or other.

Nothing more commonly disfigures a serious red than the drench of vanilla or toast and the drying mist of wood tannins, so the rethinking of oak use is valuable. There was a time when these notes were synonymous with 'quality' for consumers – but no longer. Few wine judges today are happy to give gold medals to overtly oaky wines. The play (and that's just what it is) of a truly serious red wine's aroma without palpable oak is various, intriguing and often compelling, even if such wines seem aromatically quiet or withdrawn when first poured. The most successful oaking is the least visible. In wine, never shout.

What, though, of Zuccardi's other two imperatives? Questions of richness and ripeness, I think, are best tackled in a meditative and unhurried manner, with ears firmly blocked to the whispers of fashion. All great wine is based on ripe fruit, so the principal challenge is to understand what constitutes perfect ripeness for your finest vines in your greatest sites, regardless of other outcomes elsewhere. If you rob a wine of ripeness in pursuit of a trendy number for the label,

#### What I've been drinking this month

My other neighbour at Decanter's celebratory lunch was Hervé Berland, formerly of Mouton and, since 2012, the director of Montrose (he had fished the 1975 from the château cellars). 'I like this wine,' Berland said to me. as we set about Penfold's Yattarna 2008 (also from magnum); he seemed startled, impressed and surprised. And no wonder: it was gracefully seductive, its richness that of plants, which is to say both vibrant and fresh but at the same time marrowy and sappy, and much more than fruit alone. Its qualities stole up on us softly and unshowily. In wine, never shout.

you will rob it of articulacy, harmony and the ability to give pleasure. Alcohol in itself is an irrelevance. We're all capable of adjusting our drinking patterns to suit the wine in the glass. What matters is that its harmony, its poise and its comeliness should make us want to drink it.

Extraction, too, seems to me to be an ambiguous concern for a serious southern hemisphere red-wine producer looking to match or surpass Europe's finest. Just taste the opposition! What could be more lavishly extracted than a young Barolo or young Bordeaux at the start of its ageing cycle? What southern hemisphere winemaker would not, in fact, consider such wines dangerously 'over-extracted' at that point?

It is quality of fruit allied to extractive sumptuousness and density which chiefly marks out great European red wines compared to their southern hemisphere counterparts. When you make great red wine, the skins are everything, and the juice is nothing. It's only after the juice has had the longest possible conversation with the skins that you will find out what kind of wine resource you have.

My advice to southern hemisphere wine producers with the highest ambitions would be to court extraction to the very end of reason, until grape skins and juice have delighted in each other's company, and have nothing further to say to each other. Only in that way will you know whether your own terroir might – for your own culture and your own nation – do what Barolo or Brunello has done for Italy, what Rioja and Priorat have done for Spain, what the Douro has done for Portugal, or what Bordeaux or Burgundy have done for France.

Of course, the fruit must be pristine; of course, the method of extraction should be consummately judged, and it should be calibrated to site and to variety. The process should be a courting, a wooing of qualities; reason must inform every stage of it. But if Europe has any lesson to offer those making wine on other continents, it is that fruit alone is not enough.  $\square$ 

**Andrew Jefford** is a *Decanter* contributing editor. Read his 'Jefford on Monday' blog on *www.decanter.com/jefford* 

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# Jane Anson

#### 'The mean winemaker can never make the best bottles'

FOR THE PAST six months, I have been cooking peas with a precision that had, until now, entirely passed me by. I can date back my awakening to March 2015, when I was lucky enough to be twice seated next to Michel Roux (Senior) at dinners held during the 2014 en primeur campaign in Bordeaux.

Never, never use water to cook your peas, Roux told me in his astonishingly deep and dulcet tones. Simply stir continually with plenty ('always more than you think') of the best quality butter until they are just softened but retain their juicy texture, flavour and colour. That they be freshly shelled hardly needs saying, and when presented, if at all possible, take the time to cut each pea into perfectly even halves (ok, that last bit I am yet to perfect).

This is of course just a fraction of an insight into how you get and keep three Michelin stars for 30 years. Talking with Roux makes it abundantly clear that it's not just how the ingredients are cooked and displayed, but how they are sourced, who has grown, caught or reared them, and in what conditions. The climate, soils and even food used during rearing, for example, will have an impact on the taste of eggs, butter and milk, let alone the meat or fish itself.

Roux will taste all his ingredients on their own, without salt, pepper or other seasonings, to understand their authenticity and intrinsic qualities before beginning to envisage how they will sit within a dish. So it's no surprise that his approach to wine is similarly about getting to know the producers, just as he does with the farmers, fishermen and gardeners who supply to him.

'I know what my wine producers like to eat, I know their laugh,' he says. 'I can't imagine doing something like this without knowing the people behind the products I work with. That is success for me. I have to know who makes the things that I am cooking. And invariably I like the

#### What I've been drinking this month

L'Evangile 1996 has a Incredibly taut fruit structure that is still in place as it approaches 20 years of age - the cassis and blackberry flesh stretched tightly over the drum, resonating at nearperfect pitch. This is a vintage that has remained stubbornly closed at L'Evangile pretty much since its inception, but it is starting to soften, with the violet aromatics breaking their way through the tannins. Hugely beguiling from one of the more masculine wines in Pomerol

producers. Because the best wines come from generous people. The mean chef and the mean winemaker can never make the best food or the best bottles.'

Roux's first steps in wine came with his apprenticeship, aged 14, at Camille Loyal's pâtisserie in Belleville, northern Paris. 'At the pastry shop, as an occasional treat after many long hours on a Sunday, the boss cracked open a bottle of wine with our meal and treated us each to a glass. The boss was from Alsace and so was his wine, always a wonderful white Riesling. Our Christmas treat was a glass of sweet Vouvray with a slice of a bûche de Noel'. From here Roux became chef at the British Embassy in Paris, where he discovered matching vintage Port and Stilton.

'But my real education in wines began as head chef at the age of 22 with the Rothschild family where I deepened my knowledge of wine and food pairings. At the "Rothschild University", I tasted and worked with the greatest wines of Bordeaux including Châteaux Yquem, Mouton Rothschild and Lafite. I would be able to enjoy the occasional glass of wine and as we wound down after some of Cecile de Rothschild's grand dinners, we were allowed to finish the decanters. The bonus here was that they were always great wines so this was an amazing way to begin my education'.

Today at the Waterside Inn, Roux famously oversees an entirely French cellar, the only Michelin-starred restaurant in England to do so. And his loyalty to his suppliers is legendary – he has been stocking Drouhin Burgundies for 50 years, Leon Beyer's Alsace for 40 years, supported Hospices de Beaune by buying a barrel annually for 30 years. He still heads to Bordeaux each year for tasting the fledgling vintage during en primeur week – and he has little time for those who say the process has lost its purpose.

'It's not a crime to drink a young wine. In fact it's essential to see the raw qualities and to understand them as they age, to try to uncover what the wines are hiding in their youth and to travel forward with them in time. It's no different to me from trying to get to know any ingredient – you have to understand where you are starting from.'

Jane Anson is a *Decanter* contributing editor. Read her 'Anson on Thursday' blog on *www.decanter.com/anson* 



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# 10 years on: China's breakthrough wine



It has been more than four years since Helan Qingxue Vineyard put itself, Ningxia and China on the wine map, when its 2009 Jiabeilan Cabernet Sauvignon won an International Trophy at the Decanter World Wine Awards. Sarah Kemp was invited to its 10th anniversary and a special vertical tasting

I REMEMBER THE phone call well. I was in my office and the final judging for the 2011 Decanter World Wine Awards International Trophies was taking place just a floor above me in the tasting room. 'Sarah, you won't believe this, but the Chinese wine has won the International Cabernet Sauvignon Trophy over £10,' said Christelle Guibert, *Decanter*'s tastings director.

My immediate reaction was astonishment, and then the realisation that history had been made. I also grabbed an atlas to look up where Ningxia was...

The night the trophy win was announced – on 7 September 2011, at the DWWA gala dinner at London's Royal Opera House – will

forever stay in my mind. Nobody except the *Decanter* team knew who the winners were, not even the judges.

There was an intake of breath when the 2009 Jiabeilan Cabernet Sauvignon was announced as the winner and then massive applause as *Decanter*'s consultant editor Steven Spurrier presented the trophy to Helan Qingxue Vineyard's consultant winemaker Li Demei, winemaker Zhang Jing and general manager Rong Jian.

Social media went wild and top merchants texted contacts asking for bottles to be sourced so they could taste it themselves. History was made and everyone in the room knew it. The wine map had been redrawn.

'History was made and everyone knew it. The wine map had been redrawn' Clockwise from left: *Decanter's* Sarah Kemp at the eight-vintage vertical tasting of Jiabeilan Cabernet Sauvignon; chatting to Hao Linhai, a government consultant in charge of the development of the Ningxia wine industry; the line-up of wines. Below: winemaker Zhang Jing proudly shows off media coverage of the DWWA International Trophy

So it was with huge interest and pleasure that I accepted an invitation to Helan Qingxue Vineyard's 10th anniversary celebrations in Ningxia. An eight-vintage vertical tasting of Jiabeilan, the wine whose fame *Decanter* had unwittingly brought about, was a highlight of the weekend, held at Yinchuan's Kempinski Hotel. Led by Professor Li, a vice-chair at the Decanter Asia Wine Awards and *DecanterChina. com* columnist, the line-up of wines spanned 2005 to 2013 (there was no 2007).

What was evident was a consistency of style. Freshness appeared in all my notes, and I was struck how often the wines reminded me of Left Bank Médocs. My highlights were the 2009 and 2010, both beautifully balanced, expressive and very classic, but there was also huge charm in the 2005 and 2006. The most recent vintages, while tighter, had masses of promise; nothing extracted or overworked.

The next day Zhang proudly showed me around the boutique Helan Qingxue Vineyard winery. Sitting directly below the Helan Mountains – an unusual range in that it runs north to south – the verdant vineyards basked in sunshine with a gentle breeze.

In the winery were photos of the past 10 years. The pride and passion of the team here are evident and their dedication to quality admirable. As with all fine-wine producers, their ambition is to make the most out of their land, and even though they may be in far-flung China, the team shares the same values as wine producers across the globe.

I have no doubt we will be hearing more from this winery for many years to come. **D** 

Sarah Kemp is Decanter's publishing director





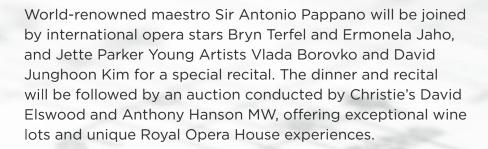
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#### WINE GALA DINNER

The Royal Opera House and Decanter Magazine are delighted to invite you to a sumptuous evening of fine dining, world-class wines and exquisite music in the beautiful setting of the Royal Opera House's Paul Hamlyn Hall on Tuesday 9 February 2016



All proceeds will benefit the Royal Opera House Covent Garden Foundation, enabling it to present extraordinary performances, remarkable craftsmanship and inspiring learning and participation projects.







**Bryn Terfel** 



**Ermonela Jaho** 



Vlada Borovko



David Junghoon Kim



Frédéric Rouzaud

#### Wines presented by their producers will include:

- Champagne Louis Roederer Vintage Rosé 2009
- Champagne Louis Roederer Cristal 2006
   Presented by Frédéric Rouzaud,
   CEO of Champagne Louis Roederer
- Corton-Charlemagne, Grand Cru, Domaine Bonneau du Martray 2007

Presented by Jean-Charles le Bault de la Morinière, Domaine Bonneau du Martray

- Ridge Monte Bello Cabernet Sauvignon 1991 Presented by Paul Draper, Chief Executive Officer and Winemaker of Ridge Vineyards
- Château Lafite Rothschild 1990
   Presented by Baron Eric de Rothschild,
   Chairman of Château Lafite Rothschild
- Fonseca 1985 Vintage Port

  Presented by Adrian Bridge,

  Managing Director of Fonseca Port



Jean-Charles le Bault de la Morinière



**Paul Draper** 



Baron Eric de Rothschild



Adrian Bridge



HOUSE

#### Decanter



ROYAL OPERA HOUSE AND DECANTER MAGAZINE PRESENT A

## WINE GALA DINNER

TUESDAY 9 FEBRUARY 2016 AT 7PM

IN AID OF THE ROYAL OPERA HOUSE COVENT GARDEN FOUNDATION

# Rolland & Galarreta

# Two pioneers from different wine backgrounds with a shared passion

ichel Rolland and Javier
Galarreta have come
together to craft wines that
highlight the great terroirs
of three prestigious Spanish
regions: Rioja, Ribera del Duero and Rueda.

Michel Rolland is a famous name the world over. He is the son and grandson of growers, and spent his childhood among the vineyards of Bordeaux. He studied oenology in Bordeaux and has a well-known oenology laboratory in the Libourne area; as a consultant winemaker he has left his mark on wines from 13 different countries. He is one of the most influential winemakers of our times.

Javier Galarreta is MD of ARAEX Rioja Alavesa and Spanish Fine Wines; he founded ARAEX more than 20 years ago, bringing together nine small and mediumsized Rioja Alavesa wineries. Then in 2001 he created Spanish Fine Wines, which took under its umbrella wineries in other regions of Spain. ARAEX/Spanish Fines Wines is now one of the leading exporters of Spanish quality wine and many consider Javier "a Spanish Wine Visionary".

Michel and Javier are thus from very different traditions. In this project two styles and two cultures come together to achieve a common goal. This is what Michel has to say about the difference between France and Spain, winewise: 'France has always held international supremacy because French wines have been exported, whereas Spanish wines were mostly consumed in Spain. As a result, many French brands continue to be



"My job has always been a passion for me: I love wine in all its expressions" Michel Rolland

reference points after more than a century. Spain, despite its rich history, does not have as many brands. But this is no reason for Spain to feel inferior.... Rioja, for example, holds and will hold a very important place in international markets. There is always room for improvement and for increased quality, but it is a very competitive region in the world. I have known Rioja for at least 25 years and I think it is a great wine region, but there is still room for progress at the viticultural level to ensure that Rioja has the wines it deserves.' In particular, he would like to see more small players in Rioja, not just to increase the number of brands in the region but also to encourage more loyalty from customers by offering them more personalised products.

#### The wines

The excellent 2010 vintage is the starting point for both red wines. The grapes for the 100% Tempranillo Rioja were were gently destemmed and the must was given a long, cool maceration in oak casks with pumping over to keep the cap submerged. The wines were aged for 10 months in new American oak. The vinification of the Ribera del Duero was not dissimilar: destemming, long maceration, pumping over; but here French oak was used for the wine's 10-month ageing. The Rioja is concentrated, ample and fleshy, with soft tannins and a velvety structure; the Ribera del Duero is elegant and complex, with silky tannins and excellent depth.

The white Rueda is from the 2013 vintage, a mild and rather wet year. The Verdejo grapes were given a cold maceration with the skins for eight hours at 7°C before fermentation; the wines were then kept on the fine lees. The grapes come from some of the best parcels owned by Bodegas Val de Vid, on poor, rocky, well-drained soils around the villages of Serrada and Rueda, in the heart of the DO. It's a complex, intense wine with notes of tropical fruits and citrus, balanced acidity and a long finish.

#### A love of winemaking

This is what Michel has to say about the Rioja: 'Our aim has been to make fruity wines, maybe beyond what is traditional in Rioja; round wines without hard tannins. I wanted pleasant wines to sell at a retail





price of €10-15: mid-range wines which are attractive in quality and price.' His philosophy has always been to understand the grapes with which he is working, and he rejects any idea that the winemaker to try to create something other than that which the terroir is capable of yielding. On the supposed globalisation of wine he says that 'there have never in the history of wine been so many different wines of such quality...the idea of globalisation is used by those who do not know anything about the market, but who love to plant the seed of doubt in people's minds.' Instead it's all about competition, about questioning yourself every day, progressing every day in order to win. There are three rules, he says: 1: Work. 2: Work. 3: Work. Of his own

**BELOW:** View of the vineyard from the R&G Rioja winery

very aromatic nose with tropical fruits followed by melon, mineral and floral aromas. Crisp and round palate, where tropical fruits and citrus notes dominate. aromas of cinnamon, spices, lavender and black cherry. Rich, concentrated and fleshy on the palate, it shows a smooth texture, elegance and complexity with silky tannins, a succulent structure and excellent depth.

career and reputation he says, 'A winemaker becomes famous through sheer hard work. Influence only occurs with time, if the job has been done properly. My job has always been a passion for me: I love wine in all its expressions, and my curiosity is still intact even after 40 years in the business. Every

liquorice and fresh

fruit aromas of the

Tempranillo

variety, with

spicy hints,

keeping the

aromas of fruit

essential

compote.

day brings new adventures.'

This latest adventure bears Michel's name on the bottle; something that has never happened before. 'It forces me to be very vigilant with regard to quality, and that is exactly what I love.

'In this endeavour, we share jobs. We are personally in charge of the production and quality of the wines. That, in essence, is our job: definition and winemaking.'



# star buys of



From the thousands of wines tasted and rated by *Decanter*'s expert judges and writers over the past 12 months, we have picked out 50 of the highest-scoring bottles available in the UK. And with 14 of them under £20, there's a host of affordable treats on the following pages to kickstart your seasonal festivities

TO CELEBRATE THE end of another year of great wines, three of our regular experts -Peter Richards MW, Sarah Jane Evans MW and Xavier Rousset MS - have chosen *Decanter*'s 50 star buys from the hundreds of wines rated Outstanding in 2015.

Every one scored 18.5/20 (95/100) points and above during the past 12 months and are all still commercially available, with the selection taken from our monthly panel tastings and Weekday Wines, as well as recommendations from our writers that have been published in feature articles and supplements. Our three experts retasted the wines blind (only the principal grape variety and vintage were known) and judged them totally on their own merits.

The tasting included lots of stylistic differences but our panel unanimously agreed on the final 50. The top 10 are highlighted on these first two pages, with the others grouped by region.

The results provoked a few surprises, with white wines and Australia the stars. Rousset found the Australian whites very pure and precise with great minerality

and balance. 'The country's wines have had a tough time, especially Chardonnay, often criticised as too extracted and over-oaked with high alcohol. Producers have reacted to that and it's paying off.' Richards also praised Australia's other popular varieties such as Riesling, Pinot Noir and Syrah for being 'better and more elegant and diverse than ever before'.

No sparkling wines made it into the judges' top 10, but Richards found the two English wines (see p28) 'wonderfully expressive and vivid'.

Evans praised the variety of drinking pleasure on offer in these 50 star buys: 'There are wines with glorious individual character – such as Charme and Chryseia from the Douro (see p32), the new-wave Argentinian Malbec blends like Ji Ji and Demente (p27), and an unexpectedly lovely expression of Marsanne from Oratoire St-Martin (p31).'

Many of the wines recommended offer great value for money (prices and stockists have been checked and updated) and can all be bought with confidence as they come with the *Decanter* seal of approval.

#### Vasse Felix, Heytesbury Chardonnay, Margaret River, Western Australia 2013

£29.95-£35 Christopher Piper, Laithwaite's, Fine & Rare, Hawkshead, Hedonism, Slurp, St Andrews Wine Co, Vin Cognito Wonderfully complex aromas of fresh dough, roasted nuts and butter. Ripe fruit palate with a rich lemon curd note, along with well-integrated oak and balanced sweetness and acidity. Racy and elegant, a stunning and refined modern Chardonnay. Drink 2016-2022 **Alcohol** 13.5%



Viu Manent, Gran Reserva Chardonnay, Casablanca, Chile 2013

£12.45-£13.99 Flagship Wines, North & South Wines, Partridges Beautiful nutty, preserved lemon rind and struck flint aromas. Great concentration of savoury tones on the palate with vivid lime pith lift and a broad, long finish. Elegantly crafted with amazing balance and lovely acidity. Drink 2016-2024 **Alc** 13%

Clonakilla, Shiraz-Viognier, Murrumbateman, Canberra District,

#### Australia 2013

 $\pm 59.30 \text{-} \pm 78$  widely available via UK agent Liberty Wines

Textbook Syrah on the nose, showing vivid cracked black pepper and dark fruit aromas. The palate has clear, bright crisp fruit with a toasty overlay and a pretty violet lift. Tight palate structure: savoury and wonderful. **Drink** 2016-2020 **Alc** 14%

Costers del Priorat, Clos Cypres, Priorat, Spain 2013 £15-£25 Hawkshead,

#### Slurp, Vi-Vino

Deep, dense, iron-rich black fruit and wild herbs. The palate has a singing, individual acidity and the Carignan, although expressive, has been tamed and focused here to good effect. The fine, brisk finish is silky and tart showing bright, ripe blueberry fruit.

Drink 2016-2030 Alc 14.5%

Pewsey Vale, The Contours Museum Reserve Riesling, Eden Valley, South

#### Australia 2009

£16.99-£20 Corks Out,

Hawkshead, Hennings, Free Run Juice, Philglas & Swiggot, SH Jones, Slurp, Solent Cellar

Glorious maturing Riesling with notes of baked apple and smoky roasted lime. Pure and precise with an oily texture and succulence. Really long, stylish and mineral, with a dynamic style. Has a sense of nobility to it. **Drink** 2016-2023 **Alc** 12.5%

Pikes, The Merle
Riesling, Polish Hill
River, Clare Valley,
South Australia 2014

£24.95 Frontier Fine Wines,

Quintessentially Wine, Seckford Agencies, Winedirect

Very pure lime and green apple aromas with a floral hint. Vibrant, taut, thrilling palate bursting with succulent green apples – it explodes in your mouth! A stony finish which will be very classy with some bottle age. **Drink** 2016-2021 **Alc** 12%



San Polo, Brunello di Montalcino, Tuscany, Italy 2010

£39-£49.99 widely

available via UK agent Liberty Wines
Dried and fresh cherry fruit
plus some earthy notes – some
age is evident here. A firm,
savoury style that is oldschool in style but very well
done. Roasted, nutty tones
and delicately chewy,
fine-grained tannins flood the
palate, yet it is still elegant.
Drink 2016-2025 Alc 14.5%

Xanadu, Reserve Chardonnay, Margaret River, Western Australia

#### 2012

£53-£60 Bibendum PLB, Exel Wines

Fresh green fruit, herbs and hint of wood smoke on the nose. This follows on to honey, beeswax and very pleasant nutty flavours with greengage and lime to compliment.

Focused, long and refreshing with a creamy texture. **Drink** 2016-2020 **Alc** 13%

Pike & Joyce, Pinot Noir, Lenswood, Adelaide Hills, South Australia 2012

£18 Fine & Rare, Frontier Fine Wines, Hawkshead, Seckford Agencies, Slurp

A very perfumed style with fine varietal aromas and floral, earthy tones. Very bright acidity with savoury flavours and noticeable bitter cherry and plum fruit. Quite wild with a lovely long finish. **Drink** 2016-2023 **Alc** 13.5%

Wine & Soul, Guru, Douro, Portugal 2013 £26.99-£30.30

AG Wines, Corney & Barrow, Fortnum & Mason, Handford, Hedonism, Vin Cognito

Engaging field blend of native white grapes. Dried herbs, toasted nuts and fine smoky cedar aromas with a mineral nuance. Lemon rind flavours mix with toast in a seamless interweaving of variety and oak. Shows great potential.

Drink 2016-2024 Alc 12.5%

# BOLLINGER

MAISON FONDÉE EN 1829



THE CHAMPAGNE OF JAMES BOND

# SPECTRE

#### Argentina

#### Gen del Alma, Ji Ji Ji, Gualtallary-Tupungato, Mendoza 2014

£12-£16 Drinkmonger, Hanging
Ditch, Las Bodegas, Selfridges,
Slurp, St Andrews Wine Co
Wonderfully scented and
engaging aromas of graphite,
violets, dried fruit and warm
earth. It has a natural edginess
with brisk acidity and delicacy.
Good drinkability with a
refreshing, savoury essence.
Drink 2016-2019 Alc 12.5%

#### Argentina

#### Passionate Wine, Demente, Gualtallary-Tupungato, Mendoza 2013

£35-£36 Bottle Apostle, SH Jones, Slurp, The Vineyard (Lancashire), St Andrews Wine Co

Fine blackberry, blueberry and grassy aromas. Very juicy blackberry fruit on the palate with mineral notes leading to a savoury finish. Nicely structured and balanced; a modern expression of Malbec. **Drink** 2016-2020 **Alc** 14.5%

#### Argentina

#### Viñalba, Cuvée Couture, Malbec-Touriga Nacional Reservado, Mendoza 2013

 $\pm 12.99~\text{Majestic}$ 

Bramble and garrigue aromas with black pepper and dried flowers. A hint of chocolate and dark cherries on the palate with a savoury, intense finish. Shows real complexity and class. **Drink** 2016-2020 **Alc** 14.5%

#### **M** Australia

#### Fraser Gallop, Parterre Chardonnay, Margaret River, Western Australia 2013

£21.43-£24 Bibendum PLB, Exel Wines, Hawkshead Wines, Slurp Richly fruited nose with hints of honey and cedar. Lively palate of white stone fruits, nutmeg and sweet spices with a creamy texture and a long, concentrated finish. Complex and inviting. Drink 2016-2020 Alc 13.5%



#### **Australia**

#### Kilikanoon, The Duke

#### Grenache, Clare Valley, South Australia 2009

Raisined aromas with mint and malt. Very pronounced and deliciously big palate showing sweet and bold peppery spices. Dense and warming with a herbal edge; long, supple and intense. Very engaging and effusive. **Drink** 2016-2021 **Alc** 14.5%

#### **Australia**

#### Leeuwin Estate, Art Series Chardonnay, Margaret River, Western Australia 2012

£60-£65 Bottle Apostle, D Byrne, Domaine Direct, Fortnum & Mason, Hailsham, Harvey Nichols, Hedonism, L'Assemblage, Jeroboams, Richard Kihl, The Secret Cellar, Slurp, The Wine Tasting Shop, Woodwinters, Yorkshire Vintner Honeyed melon and butter aromas. Big and bold with refined acidity and a creamy texture. Voluptuous, complex, pure. Drink 2016-2019 Alc 14%

#### Maria Australia

#### Yalumba, The Virgilius Viognier, Eden Valley, South Australia 2012

£25-£32 AC Gallie, Hennings, Hedonism, Laithwaite's, Love Wine Lovely, expressive apricot and honeysuckle aromas with some clever, nutty oaking. Polished and velvety with elegance and great roundness. A classic and very successful Viognier; heartwarming. Drink 2016-2030 Alc 14%

#### - Chile

#### Pandolfi Price, Los Patricios Chardonnay, Itata 2012

 $\texttt{£}18.50 \texttt{-} \texttt{£}19.75 \, \textbf{Berry Bros \& Rudd,} \\$ 

#### Stone Vine & Sun

Pronounced nose of nuts, herbs and ripe fruits. Complex and savoury palate with brisk acidity and a slight oiliness. Very engaging style, with complexity from the oak and real body from the fruit. Needs a bit more time to really shine.

Drink 2016-2023 Alc 13.5%

#### - Chile

#### Seña, Aconcagua 2012

£94.25 Albany Vintners, Bordeaux Index, Cadmans, Chelsea Vintners Co, Farr Vintners, Fine & Rare, Halifax Wine Co, Hedonism, Lay & Wheeler, IG Wines, L'Assemblage, Loki, Morgan Classic Wines
Full-on with dark fruits, cassis leaf, dark chocolate and toast. Pure, typical Cabernet with impressive characteristics. A rich, dense palate with fine-grained tannins and a long finish. Drink 2016-2020 Alc 14%

#### 🏪 Chile

#### Tabalí, Talinay Sauvignon Blanc, Limarí 2014

£12.99 Blanco & Gomez, Slurp, York Beer & Wine, The Vineking Gentle aromas with hints of nettle, peas and gooseberry; very earthy. Taut and tense but underscored by brisk, well-integrated acidity and good balance. Understated with chalk and grassy notes. Drink 2016-2017 Alc 13.5%

#### - Chile

#### Viña Aquitania, Lazuli Cabernet Sauvignon, Maipo 2006

£24.95 Winety

Lovely and wild with ripe fruits, cigar box spice and roasted green pepper aromas. Full bodied and round with lovely tannins and elegant use of oak. A refreshing style with a ripe finish – very popular indeed! **Drink** 2016-2020 **Alc** 14.3%

#### **—** England

#### Hattingley Valley, Kings Cuvée Brut, Hampshire 2011

£64-£65 Dalling & Co, Liberty Wines, Slurp, The Vineyard (Dorking)

Rich, toasty, complex and autolytic aroma. Joyous and refined with thrilling acidity and a tense, linear structure. A stunning wine with wonderful texture and focus; one that will develop further. **Drink** 2016-2022 **Alc** 12%



#### **—** England

#### Nyetimber, Blanc de Blancs 2007

 $\pm 30\text{-}\pm 48.99$  widely available via UK agent Liberty Wines

Complex green apple, herb and bready tones with some oxidative notes. Seems tense, coiled like a spring. Lovely texture and elegance with a nutty, floral finish. Needs food to fully express itself. **Drink** 2016-2035 **Alc** 12%

#### France

#### Château Boyd-Cantenac, Margaux, Bordeaux 2005

 $\pm 41\text{-}\pm 58$  Dennhofer Wines, Farr Vintners, Four Walls

Toasty, smoky aromas with a savoury edge and a serious, structured palate. Classically proportioned with energy and grace. Very pretty and classic with some maturity but still has lots more to give. **Drink** 2016-2025 **Alc** 13.5%

#### France

2019 Alc 14.5%

#### Château de Chambert, Grand Vin, Cahors 2009

£24.99-£28.99 Cornelius Beer & Wine, Exel Wines, Hailsham Cellars, Kirkness & Gorie, Liberty Wines, The Fine Wine Co, The Secret Cellar, Wine One Hundred, Winedirect Creamy high-toned blue fruit that is carrying its years really well. Dense and plummy, with a fine rasp of tannin and a lift of citrus acidity. Lively, long, and penetrating; complex and full of interest. Drink 2016-

#### France

#### Domaine de L'Echevin, Guillaume de Rouville, Côtes du Rhône Villages St-Maurice, Southern Rhône 2014

 $\pm 19$  The Wine Society

Young, juicy Viognier with peach and herbal tones.
Rounded but also quite grippy, showing varietal richness with pitch-perfect balancing acidity. Polished and very well-made. **Drink** 2016-2022 **Alc** 13.5%

For full details of UK stockists, see p116











# BEST RATED RIOJA





#### France

#### **Domaine Joblot, Servoisine,** Givry 1er Cru, Burgundy 2013

£24 Big Red Wine Co, Hallgarten **Druitt, Vin Cognito** 

Fine, fresh and bright with plum, cherry and herbal tones. Fruit-forward palate with grippy tannins and defined acidity. Needs time to unfurl and come into its own as it is showing great potential. **Drink** 2016-2028 **Alc** 13%

#### France

#### **Hugel & Fils, Gewurztraminer, Vendanges Tardives, Alsace** 2007

£33-£56 Fine & Rare, Slurp, Vintage Marque

Exotic honeyed lychee and red apple aromas - textbook Gewurztraminer. Good extract and texture here, and the sweetness is balanced by bright acidity. Expansive on the finish, and spicy too. Pure harmony. **Drink** 2016-2025 **Alc** 13%

#### France

#### Jean-Paul Brun, Terres Dorées, Chardonnay Classic, **Beauiolais 2013**

£12.95-£15 OW Loeb & Co Clean melon aromas with a mix of fresh green fruit and some tropical hints. The palate is more discreet, in a cleansing style. Long and focused with a zesty lift. Drink 2016-2020 **Alc** 12%

#### France

#### **Oratoire St-Martin, Haut-**Coustias, Côtes du Rhône Villages-Cairanne, Southern Rhône 2013

£19.95 Berry Bros & Rudd Soft apple peel scent that is guite gentle and interesting. Weighty palate that is rounded, succulent and soft with some tannic grip. All present and correct; very deftly put together by a skilled winemaker. **Drink** 2016-2022 **Alc** 14%



#### France

#### Pierre Péters, Les Chêtillons Brut Blanc de Blancs, Champagne 2007

£75 AG Wines, Berry Bros & Rudd, Woodwinters

Talcum powder, caramel, lemon and roasted apples on the nose. The palate is brightly acidic with buttery brioche tones and a fine mousse. Very fresh for its age with good focus and elegance. Drink 2016-2020 **Alc** 12%

#### Italy

#### Cascina Adelaide, Fossati, **Barolo, Piedmont 2010**

Elegant and warm, with notes of earth, tar and dried roses. The delicate mid-palate has very fine, but dense tannins, rich fruit and a touch of smoky development. Lovely cogency and finesse. **Drink** 2016-2035 Alc 14.5%

#### Italy

#### Castello di Bolgheri, Bolgheri **Superiore, Tuscany 2011**

£34-£60 Carruthers & Kent, FortyFive10, Handford, Huntsworth Wine Co

Creamy, plush plum and cassis with rich, smoky tones. Tannins are a bit fierce but it has the tangy black fruit and juicy concentration to develop. Skilful winemaking; ticks all the boxes. Drink 2016-2027

**Alc** 14.5%

#### Italy

#### Cisa Asinari dei Marchesi di **Gresy, Camp Gros** Martinenga, Barbaresco, **Piedmont 2008** £63-£70 Amps Fine Wines, Define

Food & Wine, Handford, Millésima, Woodwinters, Vin Cognito Malty and maturing, full of dried herbs and cherry; unexpectedly dense and dark. Traditional with a brisk feel

and savoury damsons and dark plum fruit. Very long and spicy with a leathery finish.

**Drink** 2016-2022 **Alc** 14.5% >>

#### **III** Italy

#### Poggiotondo, Vigna delle Conchiglie Riserva, Chianti, Tuscany 2011

 $\pm 48\text{-}\pm 50$  Exel Wines, Liberty Wines, Slurp, Winedirect

Floral, cherry and earthy fruit with firm tannins – quite punchy. An endearing Chianti that should be one of the stars of the region. **Drink** 2016-2022 **Alc** 14%

#### Mew Zealand

#### Man O' War, Dreadnought Syrah, Waiheke Island 2012

 $£34 \ \, \text{Carruthers \& Kent, Must} \\ \text{Wines, The New Zealand Cellar,} \\ \text{Oxford Wine Co, Swig}$ 

Black pepper, hints of violets and warm earth. Juicy and tangy palate with fine, firm tannins and some toasty oak. Still young and self-contained with lots of potential still to emerge. **Drink** 2016-2028 **Alc** 14%

#### Mew Zealand

#### Man O'War, Dreadnought Syrah, Waiheke Island 2013

 $£35-£36 \ \textbf{Carruthers \& Kent, Exel} \\ \textbf{Wines, New Generation Wines, The} \\ \textbf{New Zealand Cellar, Swig}$ 

Dark fruit, charred tones, some leathery tannins and bacon notes. The palate has lots of black fruit with a touch of mint; complex and classy with a black pepper finish. **Drink** 2016-2029 **Alc** 14.5%

#### Portugal

#### Niepoort, Charme, Douro 2012

£59.95 Bottle Apostle, Corks of Cotham, Fortnum & Mason, Handford, Highbury Vintners, Raymond Reynolds, Wadebridge Wines, Woodwinters

Coffee and caramel aromas lead on to a palate of dark cherry, plum and liquorice with a faint floral hint. Medium bodied with juicy fruits and firm tannins. Finishes a bit rustic with peppery spice.

Drink 2016-2019 Alc 14%



#### ortugal 🌉

#### Prats & Symington, Chryseia, Douro 2012

£50-£60 Berry Bros & Rudd,
Davy's, Fortnum & Mason, Harrods,
Harvey Nichols, Hedonism

Lovely, ripe dark berries with black pepper, bacon, violets and powerful tannins. Quite savoury and forceful in style with a rustic, complex finish. **Drink** 2016-2025 **Alc** 14%

#### 👅 Portugal

#### Quinta do Vale Meão, Douro 2012

£59.95 Corks of Cotham, D Byrne & Co, Harvey Nichols, Hanford, Hedonism, Highbury Vintners, Lockett Bros, Raymond Reynolds, Uncorked, Woodwinters

A vibrant nose of floral, high-toned, slightly raisined fruit. Decent palate weight – but not overloaded – with a fine, peppery structure and a savoury finish. **Drink** 2016-2023 **Alc** 14%

#### ortugal 🌉

#### Quinta do Vesuvio, Port, Douro 1994

£60-£91.90 Berry Bros & Rudd, Bordeaux Index, Christopher Piper, Handford Wines, Justerini & Brooks, Private Cellar, Tanners, The Wine Society

Beautiful peppery aromas of prunes, plums, graphite and muscovado sugar. Unctuous and full of life, lifted by cherry and tobacco. Balanced and maturing with a bittersweet finish. **Drink** 2016-2045 **Alc** 20%

#### ortugal 💆

#### Quinta Vale Dona Maria, Curriculum Vitae, Douro 2012

£51.45 **Corney & Barrow**Upfront, floral, creamy and plush dark fruit – seems quite modern in style. The juicy palate has a spicy, tarry character and fine powdery tannins. Quite savoury with good acidity. **Drink** 2016-2022 **Alc** 14.5% ➤

For full details of UK stockists, see p116



#### КТНМА АЛФА





Angelos Tatridis owner and winemaker

#### ALPHA ESTATI

**SYRAH - XINOMAVRO - MERLOT** 

Robert Parker: 92 points Jancis Robinson: 18 points Wine & Spirits: 90 points James Halliday: 96 points Wine Enthusiast: 91 points Decanter: Regional Trophy.

#### **M** Portugal

#### Soalheiro, Primeiras Vinhas Alvarinho, Monçao e Melgaço 2013

£13.25-£22.80 Butlers Wine Cellar, Lay & Wheeler, Noel Young, Prestige Wines Portugal, The Wright Wine Co

Clean, expressive apricot and peach aromas. Very aromatic and classic with a broad, full, herbal palate and a rounded finish. A solid Alvarinho. Drink 2016-2018 Alc 13%

#### **Marian** Portugal

Taylor's, Port, Douro 1994 £125-£145 Eton Vintners,

Hedonism, Justerini & Brooks, MWH Wine Merchants, Private Cellar, St Andrews Wine Co

Aromas of dried flowers. roasted fruit and peppery hints. Some oxidative notes linger on the palate with a tang of alcohol. It's angular but still showing well. Drink 2016-2030 Alc 20.5%

#### South Africa Boekenhoutskloof, Syrah, **Coastal Region 2012**

£38-£39 AC Gallie, Dulwich Vintners, Handford, Hedonism, Love Wine, SA Wines Online, Swig, Wimbledon Wine Cellar Elegant, refined cedar and plum aromas. The succulent,

generous, ripe red fruits are counterpointed by grainy, chewy tannins. Rich, harmonious and well made.

**Drink** 2016-2020 **Alc** 14.5%

#### South Africa

#### Keermont, Steepside Syrah, Stellenbosch 2012

£45 Hedonism, Swig Creamy caramel and plum aromas - a modern style with lifted dried herb nuances. Expressive and generous on the supple, fruity palate with firm, ripe tannins, Needs food and time but shows nice typicity. **Drink** 2016-2020 **Alc** 14%



#### **Spain**

#### Arrayán, La Suerte Garnacha, Méntrida 2012

£14 Berry Bros & Rudd

An impressive example of Garnacha at its most grown up: deep red fruits, silky tannins, and a round, supple palate. It's hefty with a long finish, and has fine tannins with a touch of spice. Drink 2016-2019 Alc 14.5%

#### 🕇 Spain

#### Baron de Ley, Reserva, Rioja 2010

£10.86-£12.49 Grand Vin, Waitrose

Evocative scents of coconut, woodsmoke, dark cherry and strawberry fruit. Displays punch of citrus acidity and a fine rasp of tannin on the long, classic finish. Very well balanced with firm structure. **Drink** 2016-2025 **Alc** 13.5%

#### **Spain**

#### Codorníu, Gran Codorníu Gran Reserva Xarel-lo Brut, Cava 2009

£135-£140 (case of three) Hangingditch, Soho Wine Supply Distinct pear and cream notes of Xarel-lo followed by brisk, herbal and waxy characters on the full mid-palate. Very engaging and drinkable with a well-defined, savoury finish.

**Drink** 2016-2022 **Alc** 11.5%

#### **USA**

#### Joseph Phelps, Insignia, Napa Valley, California 2011

£129.95-£150 AG Wines,

Handford Wines, Hedonism, Private Cellar, Winedirect

Controlled and restrained yet boasting intense dark fruit, well-managed tannins and a beautiful structure. Boldly oaked with a long finish. Delicious and well made.

Drink 2016-2018 Alc 14.5% **D** 

## CRIOS A NEW LOOK

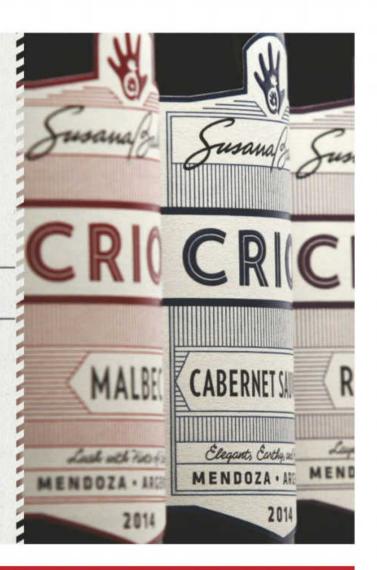
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Susana Balbo

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# Celler Jaume

#### The jewel of Codorníu's premium cavas

amily-owned wine brand
Codorníu is the leading name in
cava, Spain's famous traditionalmethod sparkling wine. And in
the latest innovation in its
464-year history, it has opened a new
micro-winery named after the company's
founding father, Jaume Codorníu.

Set inside the Cavas Codorníu grounds, Celler Jaume opened in 2013 and is not only home to the company's research, development and experimentation centre but also where the house's premium cavas will be made and matured. These include Jaume de Codorníu, Finca El Coster, Finca La Pleta and Finca La Nansa, and the future launch of Ars Collecta 456.

Celler Jaume was built on the same site in Sant Sadurní d'Anoia that Josep Raventós chose to create the first purpose-built winery for cava. It's an emblematic site both for Codorníu and for the history of Spanish wine.

Jaume Codorníu was the first member of the family that has been documented as



ABOVE The three limited-edition, singlevarietal cavas made in Celler Jaume

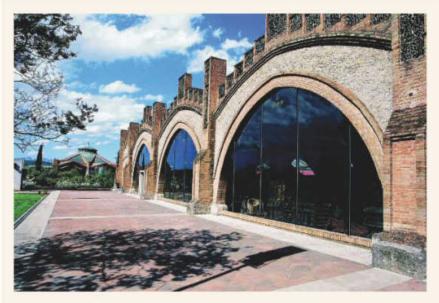
being a winemaker, so it is doubly fitting the new facility is named in honour of him and (among the other premium cavas in the portfolio), is where the house's flagship wine, Jaume de Codorníu, will be made and matured.

Celler Jaume will also house Codorníu's innovation, research and winemaking experimentation centre. Led by Bruno Colomer, the team of winemakers regularly

conducts research here and, whenever it is deemed appropriate, the results will be applied to other winery facilities.

Colomer explains: 'The aim is to carry out regular tests to continue to improve the quality of all our sparkling wines. For many years now we have been constantly innovating and seeking excellence in winemaking. Now, thanks to Celler Jaume, we have the opportunity to centralise all this in one facility.'

One of Codorníu's most ambitious programmes was implemented in 2006, when the classification of all its vineyards was complete, enabling the team to rank each region and vineyard using 30 different parameters. 'This project reminds us of grand cru classifications in regions such as Bordeaux and Champagne, only that we have done this with our own vineyards,' says Colomer. The three limited-edition single-varietal Gran Codorníu Gran Reserva cavas – Pinot Noir, Chardonnay and Xarel-lo (pictured above left) were created thanks to this project.



The new Celler Jaume winery follows the layout of the old facility. Every corner has been studied meticulously and has been fitted with precise, practical and modern equipment. It is made up of the following zones:

#### Grape reception area

This consists of a single press which receives only grapes that are meticulously selected in the vineyard and that are allocated to the premium cavas made in Celler Jaume. The grapes that enter the winery come from three different zones. The Chardonnay comes from Codorníu's vineyards in Costers del Segre, the Pinot Noir from Conca de Barberà, and the

Xarel-lo from Penedès. These three sub-zones within the Cava denomination contribute a unique mix of freshness, richness, and complex aromas, flavours and textures. Grapes are picked by hand and harvested at night. They enter the winery in 15kg boxes to avoid being damaged and are transported on refrigerated trucks (at 10°C) to ensure they remain in perfect condition.

#### Vinification room

To carry out specific micro-vinifications that preserve the personality of individual regions, estates and even of particular vineyard parcels, this room houses seven cement tanks, 20 small stainless-steel

# LEFT The modern architecture of Codorníu's new Celler Jaume winery

tanks (maximum 2,000 litres) and oak barrels. It also features an additional 100-litre tank – which has been baptised UFO – and is kept full at the end of fermentation to help avoid having to add wine from other batches during racking. Furthermore, everything is done via gravity and the rackings are carried without pumps, using a crane. Both the UFO and the gravity system are the outcome of Codorníu's continuous innovation in winemaking over the past 464 years.

#### Wine laboratory

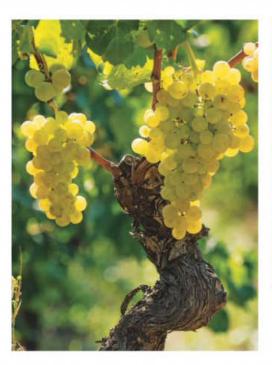
Celler Jaume has its own laboratory where the wines are analysed and monitored, although the most complex tests are still carried out in the laboratory in Codorníu's Casa Vella. The lab also features a wine tasting room. From Celler Jaume, a staircase located in an old tank (one of the oldest at Codorníu which still has its original tiles) leads to the cellar.

#### Cellar

Celler Jaume cavas undergo a long ageing in this room. A number of bottles are released to international markets but the rest remain here to mature and evolve. The wines are aged on inclined wooden racks and clarified by hand using the riddling procedure. The temperature is kept constant at between 15°C and 18°C.

Celler Jaume is a winery that reflects the winemaking philosophy of Codorníu. It is a space that seeks to maintain the personality of the five grape varieties that cavas are made from: Chardonnay, Pinot Noir, Xarel-lo, Macebeo and Parellada. It is a space where winemakers can learn on a small scale and then apply their results on a large scale to the rest of the company. It is a space to go on innovating and making premium-quality cavas.

Colomer sums up: 'What is unique at Codorníu is that we have vineyards from three different sub-areas within the DO: Penedès, Costers del Segre and Conca de Barberà, and that gives us amazing versatility in how we can create our wines. The philosophy and style of Codorníu is evident when tasting one of our ageworthy cavas: the wines retail their vivacity and freshness but with the complexity added by a long, slow maturation.'





**ABOVE** Codorníu winemaker Bruno Colomer

**LEFT Xarel-lo grapes** 

#### The Decanter interview

# Peter Gago

Say the name 'Penfolds', and the first name that comes to mind when thinking about this famous Australian winery is probably its flagship red, Grange. The second may be its gregarious chief winemaker, whose tireless devotion to promoting the brand has seen it go from strength to strength. Anthony Rose meets him

THE WHIRLWIND THAT sped through Sweden, France and Germany in the autumn touched down in London fleetingly for the launch of the 2015 Penfolds Collection. Vocal chords quavering and with no time to unpack the bags under his eyes, nothing was going to stop Peter Gago spreading the word with apostolic zeal.

Penfolds' chief winemaker soaks up the pressure when a lesser man might wilt, thanks to superhuman stamina and an insatiable appetite for the job. He may no longer have the best job in the world as Penfolds' red winemaker, but he still claims to have the second best job. Why only the second best? 'Because I have to work a bit harder, with more stress and responsibility'.

The world of Penfolds today is very different from that of Max Schubert, creator of Grange in 1951 and Decanter Man of the Year in 1988. Gago has been quoted as saying that he probably does more travel in a month than Schubert did in his career – and Schubert was

one of the better-travelled people of his day. 'Would Max have envisaged his bottles would be perched on top of the Mondrian Hotel in Manhattan, New York City?' asks Gago, rhetorically. 'Or that the Bin 707s that he created in the 1960s would be fêted 50 years later in Beijing? It's a very different market now, a very different portfolio, yet the connection with his day Elin wines and Grange. connection with his day are the

'The reason I've been at Penfolds for 26 years is that we've been left to do the wine hit' Peter Gago

Continuity within the Treasury Wine Estates portfolio is a feature that singles out Penfolds and its flagship wine, Grange, as unique. 'The thing I like about Penfolds is that this is all real,' says Gago, recalling that the Penfolds story began with Christopher and Mary Penfold in 1844. A palpable link with the old Penfold family remains. 'In my office, there's a lovely trophy given to Mary Penfold and Co for white wine. We were winning trophies in the 1890s for whites and what's old is new again. My role as chief winemaker is to keep the story new and fresh, adding another chapter here and there but not to forget where we came from.'

The link is significant because Penfolds has been though a series of ownership changes that have been less kind to other TWE brands. The Hyland family lost control of Penfolds in 1976 and a new era of corporate ownership began. When I suggest that Lindemans and Rosemount have been dealt poor hands, Gago

> defends them as an older brother might his troubled junior siblings. He respects the Lindemans Coonawarra trio of St George, Limestone Ridge and Pyrus and the Hunter Semillons but says, 'I reserve judgment on Lindemans as a lifestyle brand'. As for Rosemount, 'Yes, I lament lots of things and Rosemount as it was then is no longer Rosemount now.'

Left: former Penfolds chief winemaker Max Schubert, who created Grange in 1951





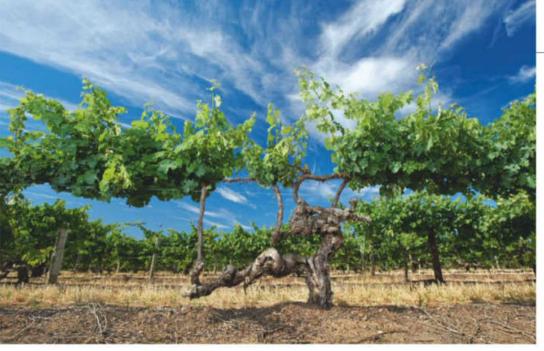
#### The wine comes first

So what pact with the devil has Gago had to make to keep the corporate finger at bay? 'I keep out of all of that,' says Gago. 'If you get caught up day to day in the corporate stuff, you'd go a bit crazy. They're in Melbourne, I'm in Adelaide,' he laughs. Doubtless he's picked up a lesson or two in politics from his wife of 33 years, Gail, leader of the government in the South Australian Upper House, 'and much more powerful than me'. He adds: 'Ultimately, the wines have pulled us through, not political acumen or corporate meanderings and movements and shakings. The reason I've been at Penfolds for 26 years is that we've been left to do the wine bit and that's a lovely part of the endeavour.

'What I delight in saying proudly hand on heart is that, within the winemaking and viticultural teams, the wine comes first.' And despite all the globetrotting and hobnobbing, Gago curbs his gregarious instincts by going into hibernation in the months before and during harvest. As well as being the human face of an otherwise soulless corporate structure, he sees his job as to 'custodianmanage' Penfolds, which means having to be on top of every small detail, from management of the vineyards and supervision of the cellar to collaboration with Penfolds' staff and growers, to selecting the blends for Grange, the Special Bin, Reserve Bin and Cellar Reserve wines.

A natural innovator, Gago's instinct is to carry out experimental trials in a continuing effort to keep Penfolds on the move. As red winemaker at Nurioopta with John Duval, he was dabbling with Pinot Noir, and in 1995 started the first Cellar Reserve Pinot Noir, released in 1997, the first Sangiovese the following year, then other Cellar Reserve >>

Above: Penfolds' chief winemaker Peter Gago is known for his 'superhuman stamina' and 'insatiable appetite' for the job





Above: Penfolds' 1951 Bin 1 was the first issue of Grange; by 1965 it came to be known under the familiar name of Bin 95

wines – a Durif, a Mataro, a Traminer, a Semillon –all still 'hugely exciting'. For all the fanfare around the limited-edition Ampoule, this glass sculpture containing the 2004 Kalimna Block 42 Cabernet came out of Penfolds' glass-on-glass closure project. A prototype 2006 Grange is sealed under glass, while commercial trials of a glass seal are 'enormously exciting' but under wraps for now.

Most recently, 2011 gave pause for thought because, along with 2000 and 1974, it was one of the three most difficult vintages in 60 years. Some said it wasn't good enough to make the cut, others that it couldn't not be released because of Grange's uninterrupted lineage.

'Of course we can do it,' says Gago. 'It's a multi-million dollar decision but I'm empowered to say no Grange. Is the 2011 one of the best Granges ever?' asks Gago in the Penfolds Collection programme notes. 'No. Is this one of the finest reds from the South Australian 2011 vintage? Yes. It's a Grange and we'll just watch it gain in complexity over time.'

# Grange's halo effect

Grange is a door opener, says Gago, and though it's been famously heralded as 'the one true first growth of the southern hemisphere' by Hugh Johnson, he won't talk it up other than to say that 'it's Australia's best-known wine offshore and for other people to decide where it sits in the pecking order'. The 7,000 to 9,000 cases of Grange made annually are less than half that of a Bordeaux first growth, he points out. Its importance lies in its profitability, of course, but equally in the halo effect it has on the portfolio that sits beneath it.

Grange came first, in 1951, the other now familiar Bin numbers following in its footsteps: St Henri (1957), Bin 28 (1959), Bin 389 (1960), Bin 128 (1962), Bin 707 (1964), Koonunga Hill (1976), Magill (1983) and RWT (1997). 'It can work against us too,' says Gago, 'for instance, when some hoity-toity

Above: these vines in Block 42 of Penfolds' Kalimna vineyard in the Barossa, planted between 1886 and 1888, are believed to be the oldest-known continuously producing Cabernet Sauvignon vines in the world

Below: Penfolds' Magill Estate is just 15 minutes' drive north from the centre of Adelaide sommelier says "been there done that". In the US they celebrate success, but in Australia we have tall poppy syndrome, which says that Grange has had its time in the sun. Grange has weathered the storm and, provocatively, I go on the front foot with it. In Germany, I said this is the wine with the world's worst wine label – and we're never going to change it.'

Gago had big Blundstone work boots to fill when he took over from John Duval in 2002, so does he believe he's taken Penfolds to the next level? 'The commentators have said that the wines have a little bit more polish and poise, that there's a freshness and sheen about them.' Spending more time in the vineyards, better presses and older vines have played their part in improved tannin management. So has the winemaking team that includes Kim Schroeter (29 vintages), Andrew Baldwin (30) and Steve Lienert (37). He can also call on the vast experience of veteran senior winemakers John Bird and Don Ditter. 'It's not revelational,' says Gago. 'It's more the 1% tweaks; when you add them up, there's a cumulative refinement.' On the effects of climate change - 'it's getting windier, wetter, colder, hotter, more extreme' – Gago credits the Penfolds-Hyland family with anticipating



# Five to buy from the 2015 Penfolds Collection



Penfolds, Reserve Bin A Chardonnay, Adelaide Hills, South Australia 2014 17.75/20 (92/100) £51.06-£69 Berry Bros & Rudd, Harrods, Lay & Wheeler Complex aromas with a mealy, leesy character similar to Meursault. A peachy, rich mouthful with nutty elements from partial new oak

fermentation, bringing verve and complexity to a dry white with opulent texture and elegant grapefruit-fresh zestiness. **Drink** 2016-2022 **Alc** 12.5%

#### Penfolds, Bin 95 Grange, South **Australia 2011** 18.25 (94)

£287(ib)-£485 Berry Bros & Rudd, Farr Vintners, Harrods, Justerini & Brooks, Lay & Wheeler Super-ripe, sweet berry aromas -like liquid fruitcake: concentrated black fruits with liquorice, cola, spice and smokiness. Rich chocolatey flavours are underpinned by a structure of muscular tannins and a firm spine of acidity. Relatively forward for Grange. **Drink** 2018-2035 **Alc** 14.5%



Penfolds, St Henri Shiraz, **South Australia 2012** 

18.25 (94) £52.86(ib)-£70 Berry Bros & Rudd, Farr Vintners, Harrods, Justerini & Brooks, Lay & Wheeler Smoky fragrance with hints of pepper and spice in a northern Rhône vein. Juicily opulent dark red berry fruit tinged with notes of game, liquorice

spice and bittersweet chocolate with a beguiling glossy, rounded texture. Drink 2016-2035 Alc 14.5%

Penfolds, Bin 389 Cabernet-Shiraz, South Australia 2013 18 (93)

£31.86-£49.95 Berry Bros & Rudd, Farr Vintners, Harrods, Lay & Wheeler A broodingly youthful 'baby Grange'

combining chocolate, cassis and blueberry Cabernet aromas with the sweeter, cinnamon, camphor and pepper notes of Shiraz but yet to fully integrate. Substantial and chewy with a firm spine of acidity. **Drink** 2018-2035 **Alc** 14.5%



Penfolds, Bin 150 Marananga Shiraz, Barossa Valley, South Australia 2013 17.75 (92)

£31.86 Berry Bros & Rudd, Farr Vintners, Lay & Wheeler

Classic Barossa Shiraz whose vivid black cherry perfume and notes of pepper and clove are complemented by a youthful vigour and real concentration of pepper-infused blackberry

fruit and sweet dark chocolate with deceptively firm, grippy tannins and a balancing savoury, balsam-like character. **Drink** 2017-2030 **Alc** 14.4%

For full details of UK stockists, see p116



the need to spread the risks both from climate change and the vagaries of climate.

# Price and pride

Almost half of Penfolds' requirements come from the company's own vineyards. Gago concedes that it would help financially if it was all their own fruit. 'We're hugely proud of our growers,' he adds. 'We've worked with their parents and grandparents.' The Grange growers club is usually a dozen or so, 'but 383,000 if you believe everyone who's said they've sold to Grange'.

Grange is based on a blind-tasting classification which removes all emotional and financial bias. Contenders are tasted for the highest quality and character and what

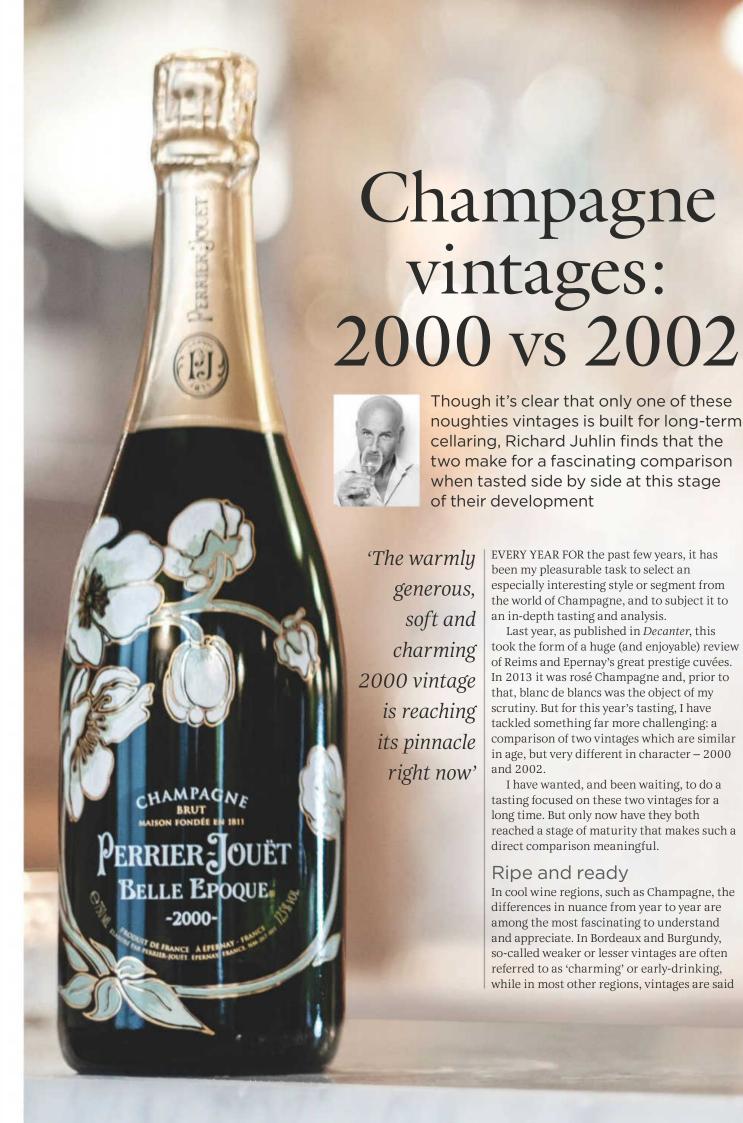
Above: Peter Gago (far right) and his vastly **experienced Penfolds** winemaking team from left, John Bird (who has worked 53 vintages at Penfolds). Steve Lienert (37) and Andrew Baldwin (30)

Anthony Rose is the DWWA Regional co-Chair for Australia doesn't make the grade cascades to the next level down.

As a self-confessed wine lover, collector and Champagne addict ('Burgundy keeps me poor'), is Gago not concerned that the price of Grange takes it out of the reach of the wine lover and collector? 'I'm the first one to complain about pricing, so you're probably talking to the wrong person. Sadly the price does take it out of the range of the average wine drinker. But is that Ferrari outside worth it? I can't afford one, but I'm not going to knock someone who can afford it or knock the car. Is Grange worth it? If it sits on the shelf and gathers dust, I guess it's not, but I don't think that's happened.'

For Gago, it proves Australia can do luxury like anyone else. 'And what's wrong with that? Some of our competitors knock Grange but have a respect for it. It's not one-upmanship. People are very proud of this wine in a nationalistic sense.' He points out that 'St Henri (see box above) still costs less than \$100 a bottle in Australia. It's not inexpensive but you can still buy a few bottles and there's a hierarchy that allows us to offer diversity and choice from a range of Penfolds wines with some of the characters of the more highly priced wines: the Bin 28s, the Bin 128s, the Bin 389s. My job is to ensure the quality is there at all levels'.

And he's not quite ready to hand the Blundstones over just yet.





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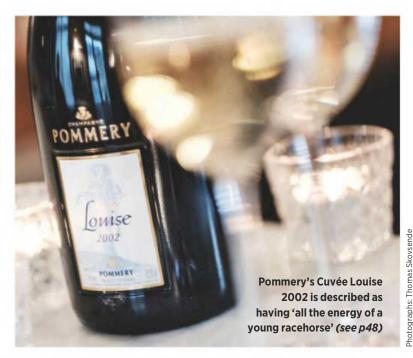
as the more adolescent 2002s. In fact, with brand after brand, it proved to be a dead heat between the two vintages, which is consistently borne out in the scores.

## Close-run thing

In terms of points, the 2002s won out – but only by a very narrow margin, with an average of 87.63 points compared to 87.32 for the 2000s. Of course, it must be emphasised that scores were based on the quality of the wines as they are drinking now – and not based on their future potential. That would have yielded a very different result, with 2002 being the clear winner.

That is not to say that 2000 needs to be consumed on the spot, or drunk up in the short term. In many cases, in spite of the low acidity of the vintage, the best 2000s have sufficient depth and concentration to hold their own for another decade.

Deciding when to open a bottle of vintage >



# Juhlin's top 26 Champagnes from 2000 and 2002



Louis Roederer, Cristal, Reims 2002 19/20 (96/100) £185(ib)-£220 Asset Wines, Bordeaux Index, Clos & Cru, James Nicholson, Justerini & Brooks. Nickolls & Perks, The Finest Bubble My expectations were not entirely fulfilled on first tasting. Aristocratic and sublime, of course, but not as full-bodied as regular vintage

wine. Retasting it recently, it was wonderfully honeyed and elegant, but be patient for further evolution. Drink 2020-2050 Alcohol 12%



Taittinger, Comtes de Champagne, Reims 2000

£125-£175 Albany Vintners, Clos & Cru, Bordeaux index, Harrods, Nickolls & Perks, The

Will be similar to the 1999. Today the minerality is excessive and it's a bit closed in a magnum

format, but oh-so beautiful it certainly is! Extremely toasted and almost flinty at the moment. **Drink** 2016-2025 **Alc** 12%

Taittinger, Comtes de Champagne, **Reims 2002** 18.5 (95)

£112(ib)-£147 Bordeaux Index, Clos & Cru,

#### Great Eastern Fine Wine , Justerini & Brooks, Nickolls &Perk , The Finest Bubble

Though very dumb when tasted soon after disgorgement, just three months later you could already taste the grandeur and concentration. There were just 35,000 bottles made in this vintage, 100,000 fewer than normal, so there will be fighting over these dense, limescented beauties when the wine finally awakens. Drink 2020-2040 Alc 12%

Louis Roederer, Cristal, Reims 2000 18.5 (95)

£150-£169 James Nicholson, Morgan Classic Wines. Renaissance Vintners

Sadly now in something of a lacklustre phase, but on first tasting this was delightfully sensual, seductively mellow and silkily replete with honey-toffee notes. At that stage the fruit was young and bursting with energy, with tones of spring flowers, gooseberries, papaya, redcurrants, pineapple and mango. Drink 2020-2040 Alc 12%

Perrier-Jouët, Belle Epoque, Epernay 2000 18.5 (95)

£141.79 Clos & Cru, Nickolls & Perks Light and elegant with an expressive, floral and beautiful aromatic juicy structure as it was in its infancy, but today has more nutty and fine, creamy vanilla tones. **Drink** 2016-2025 **Alc** 12%



Pol Roger, Cuvée Sir Winston Churchill, Epernay 2002 18.5 (95)

£120-£215 Asset Wines, Bordeaux Index, Christopher Piper, Harrods, Justerini & Brooks, Nickolls & Perks, Occidental & Oriental Cellars, Tanners, The Finest Bubble More about structural fascination than aromatic pleasure. With its high acidity

and simultaneously rich and impressive depth, this is reminiscent of the heroic 1996, and is equipped to develop far into the future. Drink 2020-2040 Alc 12%



J Selosse. Avize 2002

18.5 (95) £432(ib)-£480 Chelsea Vintners, Farr Vintners, Justerini & **Brooks, Woodwinters** 

Wonderfully open and rounded, with an exoticism and beauty typical of Selosse, while also being very true to the character of the vintage. **Drink** 2020-2040 **Alc** 12%

Ruinart, Dom Ruinart, Reims 2002

18.25 (94) £100-£106 Bordeaux Index, Justerini &

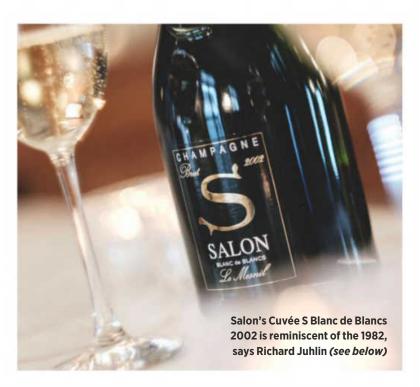
Brooks, Millésima, Nickolls & Perks, Seckford Wines, The Finest Bubble

In 2002, it was almost impossible not >

Champagne is by its nature a very inexact science. To a large extent, getting the timing right comes down to expertise and interest - and, of course, personal taste. But what a richly rewarding pay-off when you open a very good bottle from a more modest, underrated vintage such as 2000. Much better to do that than potentially to be disappointed by drinking a 2002 before its peak.

Make no mistake, 2002 is a truly great vintage and a few of the bottles recommended here should be part of every Champagne connoisseur's cellar, but I would wait at least until 2019 or 2020 before broaching them. In the meantime, make the most of the best 2000s from the selection on these pages, which are radiantly lovely and at the apex of pleasure right now.

Richard Juhlin is the DWWA Regional Chair for Champagne, a widely published writer and broadcaster on the subject, and also runs The Richard Juhlin Champagne Club



# Juhlin's top 26 Champagnes from 2000 and 2002 (continued)

to make good wine, and Dom Ruinart was a blessed creation, 72% of fruit coming from Avize and Chouilly and 28% from Sillery and Puisieulx in Montagne de Reims. Despite its youth, this is already harmonious. Everything is there in small proportions that will increase over time: white flowers, citrus, coconut, butterscotch, almond biscuits and steely mineral. **Drink** 2020-2040 **Alc** 12%



#### Krug, Reims 2000 18.25 (94) £170-£250 Bordeaux Index, Clos & Cru. Harrods. Justerini & Brooks, Millésima, Nickolls & Perks The Finest Rubble In its current condition. extremely mineral-driven and sea-splashed, showing iodine, oyster shells and a

light, pleasant bready aroma.

Crispy-clean and beautifully balanced flavour. Impressive acidity and lively elegance. **Drink** 2016-2025 **Alc** 12%

**Dom Pérignon, Epernay 2002** 18.25 (94) £95(ib)-£137 Asset Wines, Berry Bros & Rudd, Bordeaux Index, Hatton & Edwards, Justerini & Brooks, Millésima, Nickolls & Perks, Renaissance Vintners

Wonderfully caressing and typical. The silkiness and balance impress most,

along with a fluffy, creamy tone and stylish nuttiness. A great Dom Pérignon that charms from the start, but certainly not to be opened over the next four years. Drink 2020-2040 Alc 12.5%



#### Vilmart & Co, Coeur de Cuvée, Rilly La Montagne **2002** 18.25 (94) £59-£100 Justerini & Brooks, Lav & Wheeler

Very great wine, which is slightly dumb now, yet structurally grand. It is starting to show both muscles and feeling. An impressively rich and juicy

rendition of Vilmart. **Drink** 2020-2040 Alc 12%



#### Piper-Heidsieck, Reims 2000 18.25 (94) £45 Wine Republic Europe Well-constructed with enormous vigour and capacity for ageing. Piper-Heidsieck has a track record of producing Champagnes that develop slowly and beautifully over time, and this vintage is already worthy of a

higher score than it merited on first tasting. **Drink** 2016-2025 **Alc** 12%



#### Louis Roederer, Blanc de **Blancs, Reims 2002** 18.25 (94) £60 (2009) Berry Bros & Rudd, Harrods, Hedonism, Millésima, The Champagne Co

Much more straightforwardly seductive than the standard vintage Louis Roederer from this vintage (see p48). It has a sublime aroma of white lilies, vanilla, lemon pie, coconut

and acacia. Pure and elegant with a satin-like caress from start to finish. Drink 2020-2040 Alc 12%



#### Perrier-Jouët, Belle Epoque, **Epernay 2002** 18 (93)

£141.79 Clos & Cru, Nickolls & Perks Light and shimmeringly lovely with a pearly mousse. Initially tight on the nose, but slowly opens up in a style reminiscent of the finest vanilla ice cream. The palate is full of red fruits bathed in floral, creamy Chardonnay. A

shy spiciness gives rise to a biscuity nose that in time becomes roast coffee in the empty glass. **Drink** 2020-2040 **Alc** 12%

Salon, Cuvée S Blanc de Blancs, **Le Mesnil-sur-Oger 2002** 18 (93) £250(ib)-£380 Albany Vintners, Asset >



Photography by Warren & Nick





## PERRIER-JOUËT, THE ALLURING CHAMPAGNE

Since its foundation in 1811, the champagne house Perrier-Jouët has crafted elegant, floral wines of rare finesse with a Chardonnay hallmark. The elegance of the cuvees echoes that of the Art Nouveau anemones adorning the Belle Epoque bottle and offers moments of pure delight and beauty. www.perrier-jouet.com

# Juhlin's top 26 Champagnes from 2000 and 2002 (continued)

Wines, Bordeaux Index, Harrods, Millésima, Nickolls & Perks, Paramount Vintners, The Finest Bubble

A wine that reminds me of my first taste of the hallowed 1982 Salon. Though this is so young now, and it will take decades to reach its full potential, I love the way the tongue is caressed by notes of silk sheets in one place, walnut oil in another, salty minerals in another and exciting, engaging apple flower in yet another. Drink 2020-2050 Alc 12%



Henriot, Reims 2000 18 (93) £50 Clos & Cru, Millésima Super-tasty and nutty, showing a precocious maturity. Imagine all the desserts and toasted bread and nuts you can muster, and you end up fairly close to this wine's profile. **Drink** 2016-2025 Alc 12%

#### Louis Roederer, Reims 2002 18 (93) £52(ib) Bordeaux Index

Far too early to be enjoyed as yet, but at the same time already impressively well-structured and classical. I predict honey and chocolate aromas being stunningly magnificent in four years or so. A rounded, luxuriant, well-dressed celebrity of the future. **Drink** 2020-2040 **Alc** 12%

Louis Roederer, Reims 2000 18 (93) £60 (2009) Berry Bros & Rudd, Harrods, Hedonism, Millésima, The Champagne Co Great and stunningly rounded. Already unmistakably Roederer, but rather more corpulent and perhaps slightly less translucent and defined than expected. Will become a great, bready wine in due course - and it's almost there. Drink 2016-2025 Alc 12%

#### Vilmart & Co, Coeur de Cuvée, Rilly La Montagne 2000 18 (93)

£65 Lay & Wheeler

It has its own style, the 2000 vintage, and to me this wine has the same aroma as some of the Chassagne-Montrachets of Domaine Ramonet. A dominance of sweet spice, bay leaf and herbal dill aromas - resembling Swedish beef stew - followed by a hint of wild lavender and smooth crème brûlée. Very intense and delicious, as usual. **Drink** 2016-2025 **Alc** 12%



Bollinger, RD, Aÿ 2002 18 (93)

£104(ib)-£189 Bordeaux Index, Harrods, Hedonism, Justerini & Brooks, Lay & Wheeler, Le Vignoble, Millésima, Nickolls & Perks, The Finest Bubble, The Wine Society

Sophistication and youthful beauty, with a certain reticence and some distinct

but faint notes tending to mushroom, truffle and mineral saltiness. Blooming in the glass and not unlike a young RD 1975, so at some point this wine will sing the sweetest symphony of chocolate and nuts. Finishes incredibly tight and grassy. **Drink** 2020-2040 **Alc** 12%



Perrier-Jouët, Belle Epoque Blanc de Blancs, Epernay 2000 18 (93)

£325 Albany Vintners, Harrods, Nickolls & Perks

In 2000, chef de cave Hervé Deschamps chose to separate completely the grapes from the old vines at Bourrons Leroy and Bourrons du Midi in the heart of Cramant, in

order to make a superb blanc de blancs - and he has succeeded! One of the bullseyes of the vintage, with an incomparable, chalky elegance combined with silky smooth butteriness, reminiscent of a young Chevalier-Montrachet. **Drink** 2016-2025 **Alc** 12%



Jacquesson, Champ Caïn, Avize 2002 17.75 (92) £120 Hedonism

Nowadays, the production of this wine has been halved and limited to the top sites in Avize. The concentration is amazing and the purity insanely pronounced. Buttery and dense, but above all exceptionally beautiful. Like

the 2000 Belle Epoque (above), it resembles a great Chevalier-Montrachet. **Drink** 2020-2040 **Alc** 12%



Philipponnat, Clos des Goisses, Mareuil-sur-Aÿ 2000 17.75 (92)

£85 Bordeaux Index, Justerini & Brooks, Millésima, Nickolls & Perks I have fond memories of a wonderful stroll through the vines in the middle of the slope here... This wine is dark in colour and much more muscular than the 1999

vintage. Concentrated and a little old-fashioned, but showing impressive power. **Drink** 2016-2025 **Alc** 13%



Pommery, Cuvée Louise, Reims 2002 17.75 (92) £55-£95 Bordeaux Index, Divine Fine Wines, Justerini & Brooks. Lav & Wheeler

With all the energy of a young racehorse, this has an incomparably beautiful mousse, creamy texture and elegant, sophisticated fruit. Long and potent in a boldly

modern style, in keeping with all the high flying intentions of the house. **Drink** 2020-2040 **Alc** 12%

**Pol Roger, Epernay 2002** 17.75 (92) £49-£55 Asset Wines, Bordeaux Index, Justerini & Brooks, Nickolls & Perks, The Finest **Bubble, The Wine Society** 

Already very balanced, this is classic Pol Roger with the added immediate charms that the 2002 vintage brings. Nutty toffee depths, rich chocolate base notes and an airy, stylishly integrated abundance of fruit at the heart of a creamy and aristocratic palate. **Drink** 2020-2040 **Alc** 12%



Ayala, Cuvée Perle d'Ayala, Aÿ 2002 17.75 (92) £65 Cru World Wine, The Drink

Understated and delicate. fine-boned and creamy, beautifully touched with vanilla. Develops a certain depth in the glass, but falls a little short on the aftertaste. **Drink** 2020-2040 **Alc** 12%

For full details of UK stockists, see p116



# California's 'boss' vineyard

It might look just like any other vineyard, but this 200ha plot of land is North America's first growth; making some of the world's best Cabernet Sauvignon from grapes worth more than £18,000 a tonne. William Kelley reports

AS THE SUN sets behind the Mayacamas Mountains, Graeme MacDonald inspects a gnarled Cabernet Sauvignon vine, while his labrador Honeybee samples low-hanging fruit. We are in a corner of the To Kalon vineyard near the town of Oakville; it's an unassuming patch of land which ranks as North America's original grand cru. Any grapes that escape Honeybee are about to become the fifth vintage of MacDonald Cabernet Sauvignon, one of Napa Valley's most exciting new projects.

Growing up, Graeme and his brother Alex had no conception of the pedigree of their 6ha family vineyard. To them it was just a weekend playground, its fruit sold to the Robert

Mondavi Winery. But after MacDonald embarked upon a career in wine, working at some of the valley's top addresses, he soon came to appreciate To Kalon's true significance. The brothers decided to produce an estate-bottled wine, and when they realised that ambition two years ago they opened a new chapter in a long history.

That history began in the 19th century, when much of the Napa Valley lay, as one early settler put it, 'fresh from the hand of God, like a great unfenced park'. Grizzly bear and elk still roamed among the majestic oaks in an idyll known to its Native American inhabitants as *tu-la-halusi*: the beautiful land.

Below: the To Kalon vineyard in Napa Valley's Oakville AVA has a long history, dating to its original purchase in 1868



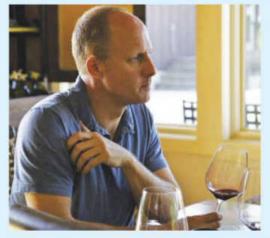
In those days, Californian wine was still in what Robert Louis Stevenson, honeymooning in the valley, called its 'experimental phase'. Like the prospectors probing California's hills for gold and silver, pioneer winemakers were exploring the young state's viticultural potential by trial and error: 'bit by bit', Stevenson quipped, 'they grope about for their Clos Vougeot and Lafite'.

It was not long before one of those pioneers struck lucky. His name was Hamilton Crabb, and in 1868 he purchased an estate in Oakville and began to plant grapevines. By 1891, that estate had grown to encompass some 200ha of prime vineyard land.

Before long, Crabb had emerged as one of California's leading producers. 'As a successful winemaker Mr Crabb is without a peer in the state,' one author wrote, and the *Chicago Herald* crowned him 'the wine king of the Pacific Slope'.

#### Ideal site

Some of the secrets to Crabb's success – and To Kalon's magic – are hidden beneath the ground. Crabb's historic vineyard corresponds almost exactly with a broad swathe of alluvial material deposited by ancient streams that flowed down from the Mayacamas mountains – what geologists call an alluvial fan.



Above: Schrader winemaker Thomas Brown finds 'ineffable natural balance' in his To Kalon wines

These deep, gravelly soils are exceptionally well-drained. Schrader winemaker Thomas Brown recalls walking the vineyard during a thunderstorm: 'There was no standing water, and 20 minutes later the ground was dry.'

Soils like these force vines to delve deep underground in search of water, creating the stress necessary for optimal ripening, so To Kalon is an ideal site for viticulture. In fact, Crabb had chosen to plant his vines on the finest alluvial fan in all of Napa Valley.

Crabb's first vintages traded under the name of Hermosa Vineyards, but he soon settled on a more classical brand: 'The name To Kalon is Greek,' he explained, 'and ➤

'To Kalon is
Greek, and
means the
highest
beauty, or the
highest good,
but I try to
make it mean
"the boss
vineyard"
Hamilton Crabb



means the highest beauty, or the highest good, but I try to make it mean "the boss vineyard".' By the end of the century, To Kalon wines had vindicated that boast, winning scores of awards throughout the US and all over the world, even in Paris.

Hard times, however, were around the corner. By the 1890s, the phylloxera louse was devastating California's vineyards. In 1899, Crabb died, heavily in debt, and his To Kalon Winery was sold at a public auction. Then, between 1920 and 1933, Prohibition put a stop to commercial winemaking in the US, doing incalculable damage to Napa's fledgling wine industry.

Before long, portions of Crabb's awardwinning vineyard had been planted over to cherries and prunes, and in 1939 his vast winery burnt to the ground: To Kalon's fortunes had reached a nadir.

By 1944, however, an energetic real estate magnate named Martin Stelling had purchased almost all of Crabb's historic vineyard, perpetuating the To Kalon name. Stelling was a visionary, breaking with California tradition to replant To Kalon in blocks devoted to single grape varieties including Sauvignon Blanc, Johannisberg Riesling and above all, Cabernet Sauvignon.

To Kalon's 19th-century reputation had been made by a variety known as Crabb's Black Burgundy, since identified as the Italian red grape Refosco. But by planting Cabernet Sauvignon in To Kalon, Stelling had hit upon a winning combination.

Of course, To Kalon possesses the deep, gravelly soils in which Cabernet thrives whether in Bordeaux or Napa Valley. But Oakville is also an ideal location for this particular grape. In Oakville, the evening fog drawn in from the San Francisco Bay mitigates the warmth of the mid-day sun, creating the perfect climate for ripening this thick-skinned variety while preserving colour and acidity.

'To Kalon possesses the deep, gravelly soils in which Cahernet. thrives whether in

Bordeaux or

Napa Valley'

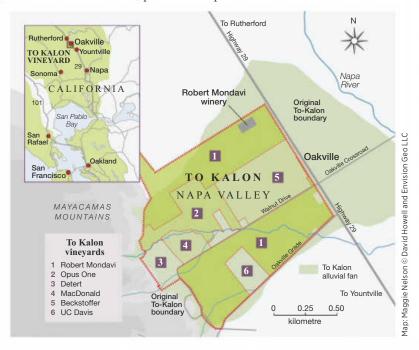
For many winemakers, Oakville's unique climate makes it unrivalled land for Cabernet.

Stelling's young vines were just starting to bear fruit when his life was cut short in 1950, and To Kalon vineyard was broken up among different owners once more. But his plantings laid a foundation for what was to come.

#### Mondavi's vision

In 1962, the Mondavi family bought 132ha of Stelling's To Kalon holdings. Four years later, the land became the site of the Robert Mondavi Winery, opening a new chapter in the history of California wine - and To Kalon Vineyard.

Charismatic and uncompromising, Mondavi's ambition was to produce wines fit to stand side by side with the great crus of France. As the son of Italian immigrants, raised in a home where food and wine were inseparable companions, he hoped to transform North American wine culture, introducing the public to the pleasures of the table.



# To Kalon: a timeline



1868 Hamilton Crabb purchases land near Oakville

1877 Phylloxera louse first observed in Napa Valley

#### 1889 To Kalon Winerv wins medal at the World's Fair, Paris



1899 Crabb dies

## 1920-1933

Prohibition



1943 Martin Stelling begins to buy To Kalon land



'The wines' capacity to surprise with each sip makes To Kalon California's "peek-a-boo vineyard" (Andy Beckstoffer, pictured above)

To Kalon was central to realising that vision. Its soils were perfect for viticulture, and its location on Napa Valley's central Highway 29 made it the ideal location for Mondavi's Mission-style winery, dedicated to inducting visitors into the world of fine wine.

Mondavi did more than anyone to raise the global reputation of Californian wine and to revive an industry still reeling from Prohibition. In the process, he reintroduced a national and international audience to To Kalon's wines.

Mondavi's flagship wine was his Cabernet Sauvignon Reserve, an elegant Bordeaux-styled red raised in the small oak barrels Mondavi pioneered in Napa, and To Kalon provided its core. When the Mondavis partnered with the Rothschilds to conceive Opus One, To Kalon fruit was equally central.

For Bordeaux-born Geneviève Janssens, Mondavi's director of winemaking and formerly winemaker at Opus, what To Kalon contributes above all is abundance: 'There is so much substance,' she rhapsodises, 'so much tannin, so much fruit – so much of everything'.

Yet despite Mondavi's close connection with To Kalon, he never chose to celebrate the brand that had brought Crabb such success.



**Above: Fred and Carol** Schrader, whose eponymous winery makes To Kalon **Cabernet from fruit** grown by Andy Beckstoffer (top)

It was not until 1995 that the name To Kalon graced a bottle of Mondavi wine: the I-Block Sauvignon Blanc, sold exclusively at the winery. Only in 2011 were the words To Kalon added to the label of the Reserve Cabernet.

#### The Beckstoffer fruit

The revival of the To Kalon name was left to others. Enter Andy Beckstoffer, a Virginian businessman turned grape-grower, whose boyish good looks belie his 70 years of age. Beckstoffer moved to California in 1969 to manage the vineyard holdings of food and beverages giant Hublein Spirits, but he soon decided to establish his own vineyard management company.

In 1993, Beckstoffer bought a 36ha parcel of Crabb's historic To Kalon vineyard which Mondavi had been unable to acquire. The vines were in terrible condition, and he promptly replanted with Cabernet Sauvignon. In time, Beckstoffer realised that this was a special place which produced wines of unusual complexity; their capacity to surprise with each sip, he jokes, makes To Kalon California's 'peek-a-boo vineyard'.

Napa insiders already knew the potential of Beckstoffer's new holdings. Paul Hobbs, one of California's most respected winemakers, had begun his career at the Mondavi winery, so To Kalon was familiar territory. He had long admired To Kalon's rounded, layered tannins, and even made home wine from the vineyard's second crop. Hobbs jumped at the chance to buy Beckstoffer's fruit for his own winery.

So did Fred Schrader, a bon vivant with a passion for quality who had co-founded Colgin Cellars, one of Napa's original cult wineries, a decade earlier. By the turn of the millennium, Schrader was establishing his own label, and To Kalon's historic pedigree immediately attracted him. When he first tasted a To Kalon wine, he was smitten: 'I knew that this vineyard could produce something world->

1962 Mondavi family buys 132ha of To Kalon

1966 Robert Mondavi Winery established





1993 Andy Beckstoffer buys 36ha of To Kalon

First vintage of Opus One includes To Kalon fruit



2002 Schrader and Beckstoffer win right to use To Kalon name > class,' he recalls. Other clients followed suit. There was only one problem: in 1988, Mondavi had trademarked the name To Kalon. Wine made from Beckstoffer's grapes could not legally declare its origins, while Mondavi could bottle anything it wished under the To Kalon brand.

A lawsuit followed. Schrader took the plunge, urged on by Beckstoffer, labelling his 2000 vintage with the words 'Beckstoffer To Kalon Vineyard'. When that wine was released in 2002, Mondavi promptly sued. But history triumphed in the courtroom: Schrader and Beckstoffer emerged victorious.

Over the following decade, Beckstoffer's To Kalon grapes fully justified his early clients' confidence. Critical applause is all well and good, but nothing matters in Napa wine quite so much as a 100-point score from Robert Parker's Wine Advocate publication, one of the kingmakers of Californian wine.

## Purity and balance

A score like that can win a formerly obscure winery a cultish following overnight, and To Kalon has won an unparalleled number. The first perfect score went to Paul Hobbs, and then a slew for Schrader Cellars – four alone in the 2007 vintage, and by the end of 2015 more than 15.

As Beckstoffer tells it, Schrader 'led the way'. His young winemaker Thomas Brown was simply the 'perfect fit' for To Kalon's soils – which was all the more remarkable since Brown had never made Cabernet before.

Schrader's To Kalon Cabernets are recognisable by their purity and breadth, but for Brown the vineyard's defining signature is an ineffable natural balance, even in the ripest vintages when lesser sites suffer. Brown's ambition, he says, has always been to capture that character in the bottle with as little interference as possible.

Success breeds imitation, and soon other vintners were clamouring for Beckstoffer's grapes, which have become some of the most expensive in the valley – sometimes exceeding \$30,000 a ton (£18,000/tonne). Nowadays a To Kalon bottling is a must-have for any new winery with pretensions to grandeur. Hobbs ruefully remarks that the vineyard has become something of a ghetto for aspiring winemakers and their well-heeled clients.

That makes the MacDonald brothers' 6ha project, just a short stroll up the lane from Beckstoffer's parcel, all the

# To Kalon: a timeline

2004

The Mondavi family lose control of the Robert Mondavi Winery to **Constellation Brands** 



2013

Inaugural release of MacDonald Vineyards' Cabernet Sauvignon

#### 2011

The words 'To Kalon' are added to the label of Mondavi's Cabernet Sauvignon Reserve



Above: brothers Alex and Graeme MacDonald now make their own To Kalon Cabernet from their 6ha of the To Kalon vineyard

more refreshing. While most of the MacDonald family's fruit is still sold to Mondavi, Graeme and Alex have been able to buy a little for their own label, which debuted with the release of their 2010 vintage two years ago.

Made on an artisanal scale, their wine represents an exciting influx of new energy in a region where the price of

# 10 top Cabernets from California's 'boss' vineyard

**Recent vintages** 



Schrader Cellars, **Beckstoffer To Kalon Old Sparky** Cabernet Sauvignon 2012

19.5/20 (98/100) £1,868 (magnum) Hedonism

A barrel selection of Schrader's finest lots and bottled

only in magnum, this is a massive wine, bursting with smoky blackberry, cassis, incense and creamy baking spices. Textural breadth and suppleness betray To Kalon's inimitable signature. **Drink** 2016-2030 Alcohol 14.5%

#### Paul Hobbs, Beckstoffer To Kalon Cabernet Sauvignon 2012 19.25 (97)

£185 Alliance Wines

One of the most sophisticated renditions of To Kalon. Complex aromas of creamy cassis, charcoal, cocoa and cigar box are the prelude to a layered, savoury and finely detailed palate. **Drink** 2017-2030 Alc 14.6%

**MacDonald, Cabernet Sauvignon 2012** 19 (96) N/A UK www. macdonaldvineyards.com

Savoury and structured, this opens up in the glass to reveal brooding notes of black cherry, cocoa, woodsmoke and black olive. Finely grained but abundant tannins structure a palate of kalaedescopic complexity. Seriously cellarworthy. Drink 2022-2045 Alc 14.5%

#### Schrader Cellars, **Beckstoffer To Kalon RBS Cabernet Sauvignon 2010** 19 (96)

£510 Hedonism

Made entirely from clone 337 Cabernet Sauvignon, this wine bursts from the glass with lavish aromas of ripe cherry, graphite, espresso coffee and liquorice. Ample and expansive on the palate, this wine's core of fine tannins and vivid acidity will carry it along in the cellar. **Drink** 2016-2035 **Alc** 14.5%

#### **Robert Mondavi Winery, To Kalon Cabernet Sauvignon**

2012 18.25 (94)

£60 Waitrose Cellar One of Napa Valley's classics, the 2012 Mondavi Reserve leads with notes of blackberry, black olive and earthy complexity. On the palate, savoury tannins and bright

#### **TO KALON**

admission can be prohibitive to young winemakers. The MacDonalds now cultivate their patch according to organic principles. Their old vines, some planted by their greatgrandparents in the 1950s, are once again farmed without irrigation. In the cellar, Graeme's light but deft touch gives the vineyard free rein, foregrounding To Kalon's structural amplitude and savoury complexity with a nod to Californian wines of an earlier era.

As Graeme says, To Kalon has always been a microcosm for Napa. Its varying fortunes and differing expressions encapsulate the history of the region since its early pioneer days. The brothers' Cabernet from this famous vineyard is an exciting reminder that history is also heritage.  $\square$ 

William Kelley is the former president of the Oxford University Wine Circle, and now lives and works in Napa Valley

acidity bring balance to a wine bursting with the ripe fruit so characteristic of the vintage. **Drink** 2016-2030 **Alc** 14.5%

Opus One 2012 18 (93) £153-£180 (ib) Berry Bros & Rudd, Justerini & Brooks, Nichols & Perks

A Rubenesque rendition of the Rothschild-Mondavi brainchild. Aromas of ripe black fruits, baking spice and cigar box lead to a generous, supple and sculpted palate. **Drink** 2016-2030 **Alc** 14.5%

Older vintages



Robert Mondavi Winery, Cabernet Sauvignon Reserve 1975 18.5 (95) N/A UK www.robert mondaviwinery.com 1975 was a great vintage for Napa, as this wine bears witness.

Youthful aromas of smoky black fruit, cedar and cigar ash are the prelude to a wine of striking concentration and energy that is ageing with effortless grace. **Drink** 2016-2035 **Alc** 13%

Robert Mondavi Winery, Cabernet Sauvignon Reserve 1974 18.25 (94) N/A UK www. robertmondaviwinery.com Hailing from another benchmark vintage, the 1974 Mondavi Reserve offers up aromas of cassis, cherries, mocha and cigar ash, followed by a deep, full-bodied palate. Whereas the 1975 is more elegant and ageworthy, the 1974 is more pliant and voluptuous. **Drink** 2016-2030 **Alc** 12.6%

**Opus One 1979** 18 (93)

N/A UK www.opusonewinery.com
The inaugural vintage of
Opus One, made from the
same raw materials as the
1979 Mondavi Reserve, is
still going strong, bursting
with cedary black fruit,
woodsmoke, asphalt and
forest floor. On the palate
the wine is mellow, layered
and harmonious.

**Drink** 2016-2020 **Alc** 12.9%

Robert Mondavi Winery, Cabernet Sauvignon Reserve 1984 16.75 (89) N/A UK www.

robertmondaviwinery.com

From a cool vintage, this wine opens in the glass to reveal notes of bright raspberry, cedar and dried herbs. Juicy and supple on the palate, the structured tannins have largely melted away. **Drink** 2016-2020 **Alc** 12.5%

For stockist details, see p116



# The Luck and Science of High Altitude Terroir

Catena's unusual Adrianna Vineyard parcels and the future of ageability and climate change in South America

here are many ways of discovering a new and great terroir. Luck plays a part, but luck is nothing if you don't know what you're looking for; understanding what might constitute an extraordinary terroir is particularly challenging in these days of climate change.

It was in the 1990s that Nicolás Catena Zapata realized he had to search for cool climates in Argentina. Jacques Lurton of Bordeaux provided the spur: he told Nicolás that his Cabernet Sauvignon tasted as if it came from the Languedoc. It was not what Nicolás wanted to hear. But the implication was clear: if his wine was to rival the great wines of France he needed cooler vineyards. In 1992 he settled on Gualtallary Alto: at 1500 meters it's the highest and westernmost spot in Tupungato, cool, but protected from frost to some extent by the nearby mountains. It has a slight slope and there is also a small hill. He called the vineyard



"The Catena
Institute's
mission is to
elevate
Argentine wine
for another
100 years"

Adrianna after his youngest daughter.

Nicolás planted the Adrianna Vineyard with Cabernet Sauvignon and Chardonnay cuttings from France, and with Malbec taken from Lot 18 of his 70-year-old Angélica vineyard. Over the next few years the wines consistently proved to have more minerality and more acidity than wines from other sites in the Uco Valley. The Adrianna Cabernet had more pyrazines – the molecules that give the variety its characteristic capsicum flavor. The Malbecs had more grip and denser tannins, and the Chardonnays were both mineral and 'fat'.

But the site was not homogenous. And that's where Laura Catena, Nicolás's older daughter, enters the picture. 'I was doing my usual round with one of the viticulturalists,' she says. 'We walked up the hill in the center of the vineyard and I saw several areas where the vines were too vigorous, or where they looked so small that I wondered if they were diseased.' The viticulturalist's solution was







simple: rip everything out, mix all the soil together, and replant.

Laura took the opposite view: instead, she would study the vineyard in all its variability. Her background was in scientific research: she'd studied biology at Harvard and microbiology at Stanford, and was practicing as a physician at a teaching hospital in California. So she handpicked a group of winemakers and viticulturists and founded what is now the Catena Institute of Wine. Its focus was to be Malbec and high-altitude viticulture and winemaking.

What Laura and the Institute have found has had vital implications not only for Adrianna, but for Argentine wine in its entirety. Adrianna first: soil pits (some 70 per hectare) showed a volcanic subsoil packed with rounded boulders: this explained the site's phenomenal drainage. The topsoil is rich in limestone and gravel, both alluvial and aeolian. The site was formed by a river, which over many years had been forced by seismic activity to move gradually south, leaving behind a series of limestone terraces. When Laura and winemaker Aleiandro Vigil began separate vinification of tiny parcels with different soil profiles, they saw remarkable differences of aromas and flavors. In 2008, from two different parcels, the Adrianna Vineyard White Stones and White Bones Chardonnays were born, receiving the highest ratings for a South American white from many of the world's most prestigious wine publications. Since 2004, the Catena Zapata Adrianna Vineyard Malbec has been sourced from a particular 1.4-ha parcel with a shallow topsoil of crumbled limestone and gravel. What excites Laura most about these single-parcel wines are their distinctive characteristics and potential for ageing. 'I am making wines for our grandchildren and great-grandchildren to drink,' she says, 'I'd rather have a wine than a cemetery headstone to be remembered by.'

Altitude matters, too. The cool climate preserves acidity and keeps sugars in check. Adrianna will give



perfectly ripened tannins at 13% alcohol. Laura wasn't surprised by the higher natural acidity at Adrianna, but the higher level of polyphenols and tannins did surprise her. One of the Catena Institute's PhD students discovered that it is the intensity of the sunlight that produces more skin tannins. More recently the Institute, in collaboration with Argentine Professor Patricia Piccoli, has been looking at rhizobacteria in soils, like those of Adrianna, which are extraordinarily poor in organic matter. Rhizobacteria live in symbiosis with the vine's roots and help the vine withstand stress. This has clear implications for a world in which water will be in shorter supply. Says Laura, 'studying the vineyard soil microbiome might yield natural ways that could help us adapt to climate change.'

The future is full of 'what ifs'. The Catena Institute's mission is to elevate Argentine wine for another 100 years, a second century for a family winery founded in 1902 by Italian immigrant Nicola Catena. The Institute exists to offer private and public collaboration in research: 45% of vineyards in Mendoza are owned by small producers with less than four hectares. 'We are fighting to preserve not just a beverage, but a way of life,' says Laura Catena.

Clockwise from above left: Laura Catena, 4th generation Argentine vintner; stony soil, the lookout at Adrianna Vineyard; Adrianna Vineyard in the winter



## **Producer profile**

# Vik

Started from scratch less than a decade ago in a remote valley to the south of the Chilean capital, this ultra-modern estate was born of the vision of an entrepreneur from Norway. Michael Apstein charts the development of its singular wine, a blend that brings together Bordeaux know-how with essential Chilean character

DOES THE WORLD need another £65 bottle of Chilean wine? Your initial reaction is probably no, but it's possible you haven't tasted the 2011 vintage from Viña Vik. This is an extraordinary wine, made by an extraordinary team, led by Patrick Valette who, though clearly pleased with the result, takes little credit for it. He explains that it's the two years of searching for a site that lies behind this wine's combination of elegance and power.

The story behind Viña Vik is, first and foremost, a focus on place. In the 1990s, Carrie and Alexander Vik were, like so many people at that time, becoming infatuated with wine. They took trips to wine regions and attended wine dinners. On a trip to St-Emilion in 1997 Alex, a marathoner, was running through vineyards and noting the subtle differences among them – slightly different

# Vik at a glance

Established 2006 CEO and winemaker

#### Above: the winery buildings at Viña Vik were designed by Chilean architect Smiljan Radić

exposures, soils, even temperatures. It reinforced in his mind the critical importance of terroir – the driving force for the Viks in their challenge to make a great wine.

There are only two ways to obtain a special site: you either buy into well-established areas such as Burgundy, Bordeaux, Napa or Barolo; or you can hope to find an undiscovered one.

For the Viks, the search was on. Even if land had been available in established appellations, that was out of the financial question for a start-up. So in 2004 they assembled a team of geologists, climatologists and oenologists and started looking elsewhere for an undiscovered, unique terroir. They were familiar with South America – both were fluent in Spanish and



Photograph: Fernanda Claro



Above: Patrick Valette has previously made wine in Bordeaux and for other major producers in Chile

Left: a lake sits at the heart of the horseshoeshaped parcel of land on which Viña Vik's vineyards are planted

they already owned properties in Uruguay – so off they went to Chile, Argentina and Uruguay.

They recruited Patrick Valette, a Frenchman from a renowned winemaking family, to help find a site. Valette was a perfect fit; in addition to having worked in Bordeaux, he was born in Chile and grew to know its viticultural landscape well. His introduction to wine came from his grandfather, Alexandre, who had been a major négociant buying Bordeaux wines since the early 20th century. When premier grand cru classé property Château Pavie in St-Emilion came up for sale in 1943, Alexandre snapped it up. It wasn't an ideal time to be buying property in France, but since he had been buying Pavie's wine for decades as a négociant, he knew its quality and couldn't resist.

Patrick lived at Pavie with his brothers and sisters after their father, Jean-Paul, took over the winemaking in 1967. In addition to what he had learned growing up at Pavie, Patrick had first-hand experience in St-Emilion where he was responsible for the giant leap in quality in the wines of Château Berliquet, a previously underperforming grand cru classé property.

'Valette was struck by the presence of daily cooling breezes, the maritime influences reminiscent of Bordeaux, and the proximity to the Andes mountains'

The commercial director of the Viña Vik team, Gonzague de Lambert, also has Bordeaux in his blood: his father is owner of high-quality Pomerol estate Château de Sales.

## Virgin territory

Valette's Chilean experience – he made wine and consulted for some of the leaders in the Chilean wine industry, including Viña Neyen de Apalta, Viña Santa Rita, Viña Quebrada de Macul, TerraMater and Viñedos J Bouchon – was invaluable, giving him an intimate knowledge of Chilean wine topography.

After searching for two years, the Vik team found an unplanted wilderness tract of 4,500ha (hectares) in Millahue Valley, about 160km south of Santiago, close to the Apalta Valley winegrowing area. With no roads on the property, they were forced to tour it on horseback. Valette was particularly impressed by the balance of vegetation they found there, and the Vik team then drilled 4,000 test holes to analyse the soil. They came away convinced that a horseshoe-shaped piece of land with a lake in the centre, 65km east of the ocean and an equal distance from the Andes, with its multiple exposures, was ideal for vines.

For his part, Valette was struck by the presence of daily cooling breezes – the maritime influences reminiscent of Bordeaux – and the proximity to the Andes mountains, which keeps night-time temperatures low, allows grapes to retain acidity and imparts vibrancy and freshness to the wine.

Despite working in what must be one of the most dramatic and beautiful wineries in the world, Valette barely makes mention of it. Instead, he waxes lyrical about the vineyards and viticulture: how they planted in a way designed to prevent the berries from being burned by the sun, and how he preferred grafted vines, even though Chile is one of the few places in the world to be free of phylloxera – he thinks they help in terms of water management. And how they match the vines – Cabernet Sauvignon, Carmenere, Cabernet Franc, Merlot and Syrah – to the multitude >



of microclimates across their 400ha. Like many top-end Bordeaux properties, Vik has divided its vineyard into scores of different blocks, each of which it vinifies separately in custom-sized vats. This parcelisation allows the winemakers to study what Valette calls 'micro-terroir', to see how the character of the grapes changes over the years as the vines mature, and helps them to tweak the blend.

Valette explained the subtle differences in plots due to composition of soil, its humidity, temperature and even microbial activity, as well as the varying altitudes (from 215m to 300m above sea level), all of which influenced what and where he planted. 'We planted Merlot only where the soil contains at least 25% clay, because it needs the humidity.'

Above: located in the Millahue Valley, close to Apalta, the vineyards at Vik are divided into many individual blocks

#### Strict selection

For now, Vik produces just a single wine, using red Bordeaux varieties plus Syrah (see opposite). Valette believes Cabernet Sauvignon provides the 'iron skeleton', while Carmenere adds structure, but he cautions that using too much can make the wine green. Having grown up in St-Emilion, he is very familiar with Cabernet Franc, but knows that the wrong amount also detracts from elegance because of its potential for 'angular tannins'. He loves the roundness Merlot brings to the wine and looks for the peppery (not meaty) aspect of Syrah as an 'exotic touch'. They opted against Petit Verdot, because Valette believes it can be too powerful, and he wants their wines to be all about elegance. Indeed, the blend has evolved

# Vik: a timeline

1984-1998

Patrick Valette is partner/owner at Château Pavie in St-Emilion





1996-2007 Valette is winemaker at Château Berliquet in St-Emilion





Above: Alexander Vik (third from right) and his wife Carrie with the rest of the team at Viña Vik

resulting higher alcohol levels.

Vik produced only 30,000 bottles in 2011 because, as at top-end Bordeaux châteaux, it was subject to a severe selection, with some 70% of its grapes or wine sold off, according to Carrie Vik, and only the best lots kept for itself. As the vines mature, Vik hopes to double production, as long as it can maintain quality.

The 2011 Vik is an extraordinary wine, especially considering the young vines. It has a real Bordeaux sensibility and finesse, yet it is quintessentially Chilean. Is it the inclusion of Syrah; that only the best grapes were used; the Millahue terroir; or is it the combination of all of these? Or maybe it's true that, with careful study, you can locate undiscovered great vineyard areas. Though it's too early to tell, especially based on just one wine, Valette and his team may have done just that.

Michael Apstein is an awarded US-based wine writer, educator and judge

to reflect this focus. The conventional wisdom was that Carmenere was especially well-suited to this area, close to the Apalta Valley. But Valette now believes that their site lends a particular charm and delicacy to the Cabernet Sauvignon, which explains why the 2011 Vik - his third vintage, but the first commercially released wine – contains less than one-third Carmenere, down considerably from twothirds in the initial vintage, along with a corresponding increase in the proportion of Cabernet Sauvignon.

Valette is especially concerned with the tannins: 'As the tannins ripen and become silky, the grapes lose a bit of fruitiness,' he says. This is a trade-off he happily accepts in Chile's warm climate. He maintains that with careful work in the vineyard they can obtain supple tannins without high sugar levels and the

2004 Carrie and Alexander Vik start searching for land in South America

2006 Viña Vik established

# 2011 First commercial vintage 2008 Entire harvest lost to birds in one night 2009 First vintage

# A taste of Vik

# Viña Vik, Cachapoal Valley, **Central Valley, Chile 2011** 17(90) POA Berry Bros & Rudd A harmonious blend of Cabernet

Sauvignon (55%), Carmenere (29%), Cabernet Franc (7%), Merlot (5%) and Syrah (4%) delivers an engaging impact of red and black fruit aromas. With time in the glass, a plethora of herbs and other savoury notes emerge to join the primary berry fruit. The suave oak - this

wine has spent nearly two years in new French barrels - is beautifully integrated. Supple, fine tannins allow immediate enjoyment, but a decade of cellaring will reap rewards. Powerful yet elegant. Drink 2016-2025 Alc 14%

For full details of UK stockists, see p116

# The lure of Greek wines

# Native grapes and modern winemaking from the cradle of wine civilisation

rape growing and winemaking have long been an inseparable part of life in Southern Europe, and around the shores of the Mediterranean. The history of wine here dates back at least 4,000 years and Greece has a strong claim to being the place where wine culture originated, and then spread around the world. It was the Ancient Greeks who gave wine its social status and prestige, protected by Dionysus, the Greek god of wine. Wine became a symbol of civilisation - to share with guests and to enjoy with food, rather than simply being another drink. The few years have seen a revolution in attitudes towards quality wine from Greece and today a new generation of producers is aiming to put

Greece back on the world wine map, particularly through focus on the huge range of exciting indigenous varieties that are scattered across the Greek landscape. These local grapes provide a great way to experience the very different places where they are grown, across mountains and plateaus, to islands and seashores.

Xinomavro is the most important variety in northern Greece and the only one permitted in the Protected Designations of Origin (PDO) of Naoussa and Amyndeon. Its name means "acid black" and it is this hallmark acidity that is the key to this variety, giving liveliness and longevity. Xinomavro produces relatively pale reds that can be austere when young, but definitely repay ageing as this allows great complexity and elegance to develop as the

core of red cherry develops notes of ripe tomato and black olive. Modern approaches to winemaking and better vineyard work are also helping to maximise the grape's exciting potential. It's also versatile enough to make appealing Blanc de Noir and appetising rosé. A 1984 Xinomavro, the very first vintage from Naoussa still impresses today. Naoussa itself lies on the foothills of Mount Vermion with vines vying for space among peaches and cherries, while not too far away lies the Amyndeon plateau. This is the most northerly and also highest PDO in Greece at over 650 metres. It's a limestone plateau with sandy soils where ancient Xinomavro vines have survived almost a century and still produce amazing wine. Winemaker of the region of Amyndeon Angelos latridis says, "Xinomavro is our weapon to conquer the wine world."

Heading south to the Peloponnese, the viticultural landscape is different again. Home to so many Greek landmarks and legends like the Olympic Games and the lion of Nemea defeated by Hercules, here it is Agiorgitiko (or St George's grape) that takes the red wine crown. It's the most widely planted red variety in Greece, making styles from light rosé to serious reds. It produces wine with vivid raspberry fruit, often with a hint of cloves and vibrant acidity, with a touch of Pinot Noir-like





# The "South Europe/ Mediterranean Wines" Campaign

This is a joint project financed by the European Union along with Greece, Italy and Bulgaria. Its objective is to highlight wines from the region with **Protected Denomination of Origin** and with Protected Geographical Indication. It covers the Greek wine regions of Macedonia, Peloponnese and Crete, along with Italy's Emilia Romagna, Bulgaria's Thracian Lowlands and the following Greek wine producers: Vaeni Naoussa, Alpha Estate, Domaine Skouras, Mediterra winery and Alexakis winery. We want to introduce wine drinkers to a new experience that comes from the region where wine culture was born and spread around the globe. Enjoy responsibly!

elegance, though it's not related. Agiorgitiko arguably reaches its peak in the PDO of Nemea where it is the only permitted variety. Agiorgitiko also appears along with Cabernet Sauvignon in the first wine George Skouras (winemaker of the region of Nemea) ever made in 1986 and still the winery's flagship today. This region is a patchwork of mountains and small valleys where vines are protected from disease and baking summer heat by alternating breezes from the sea and the cool mountain-tops. The region also grows intriguing white varieties, led by the delicate and beautifully aromatic Moscofilero. Aromas of jasmine and lemon blossom, with crisp appetising acidity are typical characteristics. There are several is colour mutations to be found and one that looks particularly promising the darkskinned Mavrofilero, which has enough mineral structure to benefit from wild fermentation and lees ageing.

The island of Crete brings yet another dimension to the fascinating jigsaw puzzle of Greek wines, with its long proud history dating back to Minoan times and before. The island can be hot, lying just 60km from Libya but the vineyards are cooler than the Greek mainland as they are typically on north-facing slopes, moderated by sea breezes. Crete has been lagging behind the mainland but is catching up fast in recognising the potential of its local grapes. Leading white grapes include the gentle, soft Athiri, which also works well in blends to



match the exciting but assertive crispness of Assyrtiko. This thrilling variety has recently become famous on Crete, where its original home and it is very much at home in the island's volcanic soils. Vidianó is another promising white that was nearly extinct, but is gaining increasing attention (Alexakis picked up a DWWA gold for its 2013) with its inviting flavour of fresh-cut pears and fine, long finish, great with Cretan cooking. Vilana is the most planted white grape on the island, surviving because it can be generously productive, but it also has great quality potential from old vines on chalky outcrops. There are only two native Cretan reds: Kotsifali and Mandilaria. Mandilaria is deep coloured

and can be tannic, but may lack body so it is often blended with the softer, fruitier and more alcoholic Kotsifali, a blend that is specified in Crete's PDO Peza.

Greece is a fascinating mosaic of wines and places to discover - well worth exploring.



SOUTH EUROPE Mediterranean





# Decanter's guide to anniversary buys

There's something particularly satisfying about cracking open a bottle of wine that was 'born' in the same year as you. So in 2016, what delights, or disappointments, are in store for those marking the passing of a significant number of years? Anthony Rose recommends the gifts to go for

AMONG THE MANY benefits that would accrue from living in the best of all possible worlds, being able to choose the vintage you were born in would be a significant one for wine lovers. Imagine the birthday presents!

In the real world we must make do with our lot, eyeing in 50 shades of green envy the 55-, 34- and 26-year-old claret lovers born in the great Bordeaux vintages of 1961, 1982 and 1990 respectively, the 52-year-old Rioja devotees whose stars aligned with the wonderful 1964 vintage, or 53- and 39-year-old Port lovers lucky enough to have been born in the anni mirabili of 1963 and 1977.

For the teetotaller in your life, chocolates or a gym membership, both perhaps, will suffice, but for the majority of this magazine's readership, wine presents an unmissable opportunity to spoil loved ones reaching a significant milestone in 2016, most notably 18, 21 and 25, not to mention the big 20s, 30s, 40s, 50s and beyond.

As horses are for courses, the question is: which is the wine that will fit the bill?

In considering a gift for a 2016 birthday or anniversary, bear in mind that the finer the wine, the greater its track record of longevity

'Port, Sherry
and Madeira
have long
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wither them'

is likely to be. Top reds such as Bordeaux, Burgundy, Rhône and Barolo stored in good conditions should be robust enough to improve with time.

As time goes by, the condition and provenance of a wine become increasingly important. Vintage assessment is an imprecise science because of the many permutations of quality and character from one producer to the next but, as a general rule, the greater the vintage and the better the producer, the longer the wine's likely staying power. And large-format bottles, beginning with magnums, are not just impressive tokens of generosity but they tend to age better too.

The fine wine with the broadest secondary market is Bordeaux, by some distance, making it the easiest choice to seek out and buy. Vintage Champagnes also provide excellent options, marrying ageability with the notion of celebration. Age-dated Sherries, vintage Ports and Madeiras (see p70) make excellent presents thanks to their longevity, while Port offers both vintage and 20-, 30- and 40-year-old tawnies. Ageworthy Burgundy, Rhône, Barolo, Brunello, Supertuscans, Sauternes, sweet German Rieslings and New World stars

raph: Li Ding /Alamy Stock Photo



Above: hunting out the right wine from the right vintage can be just as much fun for the generous gift-giver as it is for the lucky recipient to receive it

such as Grange or Opus One are not as easy to find, but a good search engine such as *Wine-searcher.com* and auction catalogues can help to unearth suitable vintages.

While vintage and age-designated wines are a useful hook on which to hang a birthday or anniversary, it's also worth considering the many gift packages that wine merchants put together. Merchants such as Berry Bros & Rudd have a dedicated gifting page with packages including Champagne, Bordeaux, Burgundy and Port as well as a budget Gifts under £50 category. Laithwaites, Majestic, Marks & Spencer, The Wine Society, Virgin Wines and Waitrose, among others, also offer wine gift services. High on my list of welcome gifts? Life membership of The Wine Society for a one-off payment of £40, the remarkable Coravin wine preservation device, Zalto stemware and the

Le Nez du Vin tasting kits for the budding Master of Wine in your life.

But if you're wanting wine, then let's take a closer look at the runners and riders in 2016...

2016: first things first

One of the reasons why Port, Sherry and Madeira have for so long been part of the tradition of laying down is because age shall barely wither them.

There is one unusual gift that fits nicely with the tradition of laying down a case of vintage Port for a child or godchild or to commemorate an anniversary or birthday. Last year, Graham's came up with the idea of a Vintage Port Bond for a case of vintage Port in the year of the harvest, to be redeemed when the wine is bottled and shipped. Ah yes, I hear you say, but what if 2016 is not declared as a vintage? The ingenious solution offered by Graham's is to provide two cases of Quinta dos Malvedos, worth slightly more, instead. ➤



# 18th (1998)

1998 was a good year for Left Bank Bordeaux, very good in St-Emilion and Pomerol, excellent in the Rhône, especially southern Rhône, but less so in Burgundy and Champagne, although there are some notable exceptions. It was also good in Barolo and Barbaresco, but more mixed in Tuscany.

From Pomerol, the 1998 L'Eglise-Clinet was one of the standouts of the vintage: a voluptuously textured, powerfully rich red Bordeaux with considerable staying power. On the Left Bank, 1998 Château Palmer was super-concentrated and remains youthful today. In the Rhône, Jamet's 1998 Côte-Rôtie is one of the most elegant wines of the vintage, while in the southern Rhône, Château Rayas' 1998 Châteauneuf-du-Pape is layered with immense richness and complexity, and still going strong. A more affordable alternative, the spicy, opulent 1998 Château de Beaucastel is coming nicely into its own. In Burgundy, Mommessin's dense and sensual 1998 Clos de Tart has the structure to hold up well.

From Champagne, Taittinger's 1998 Comtes de Champagne is an outstandingly rich yet subtle blanc de blancs with a superb mineral spine, and Piper Heidsieck's 1998 Cuvée Rare is another perfect option. From the New World, Penfolds' superb 1998 Grange is only just starting to drink now but has a good decade left in it, probably longer.

# 20th (1996)

1996 was a great year in Bordeaux, especially on the Left Bank, with many of its Cabernet-dominant wines having considerable staying power. A keeper in Burgundy, average in the Rhône, and a classic, long-lived vintage in Champagne and in Piedmont, with life-enhancing acidities all round.

There is an embarrassment of riches in the Médoc, but I would plump for a case of the wonderfully textured, rich St-Estèphe, 1996 Château Montrose; an affordable alternative, the excellent 1996 Château d'Angludet from Margaux has a good 20-year life in it in a good vintage. In Champagne, I would stay with Taittinger's super-elegant 1996 Comtes de Champagne – a cushioned mousse of earthy delights. And for Barolo, Aldo Conterno's wonderfully full-fruited and hauntingly fragrant 1996 Vigna Cicala.

For some sweetness with a difference, the 1996 Mézes Mály 6 Puttonyos from Hungary's Royal Tokaji Co is reaching its perfect peak after two decades.



# 21st (1995)

We've hit the jackpot here. 1995 leaves any anniversary gift-giver spoilt for choice and any 21-year-old recipient simply spoilt, because it was such a fine year in so many regions. This was a consistently high-quality vintage in Bordeaux, both on Left and Right Banks.

1995 was very good in Burgundy, especially Chambolle-Musigny, successful in the Rhône too, Côte-Rôtie and Châteauneuf-du-Pape in particular, also good in Piedmont and much better than anticipated in Champagne.

If you're wanting to buy Bordeaux, my choice would be to plump for the magnificent 1995 Château Léoville-Las-Cases, comparable to any first growth in the vintage, and the richly concentrated, long-lived Château Cos d'Estournel. The 'poor man's Mouton' Château Lynch-Bages, and Château La Lagune, often excellent value, were also on fine form this year, as, on the Right Bank, were the



Above: 1991 Penfolds Grange, 1995 Charles Heidsieck Blanc des Millénaires, 1998 Château Rayas from Châteauneuf-du-Pape. 1996 Château Montrose from St-Estèphe, and **Grahams 30 Year Old Tawny Port** 

powerfully concentrated Château Angélus and the genuinely great Pétrus.

From Burgundy in 1995, Michel Lafarge's Clos du Château des Ducs Volnay would be a wonderfully generous gift, and Armand Rousseau's Clos de Bèze Chambertin even more so, with a 1995 Clos de la Roche Grand Cru Collection from Nicolas Potel certain to be barely less well received.

From the Rhône, I would plump for Chapoutier's magisterial 1995 Le Pavillon Ermitage while from Rioja, La Rioja Alta's Gran Reserva is one of the most accomplished and ageworthy Spanish reds.

In Champagne, it's an unenviably tough choice between the stupendously rich, toasty and mineral 1995 Blanc des Millénaires from Charles Heidsieck, Krug's inaugural, hedonistic Clos d'Ambonnay, Pol Roger's refined Cuvée Sir Winston Churchill, the super-elegant Deutz Blanc de Blancs and the distinguished Louis Roederer Cristal.

'1995 leaves any gift-giver spoilt for choice and any 21-year-old recipient simply spoilt, because it was such a fine year in so many regions'

# 25th (1991)

Oh dear, did you say 1991? This was one of those vintages that got away - 1991 simply didn't linger long in the memory because it was tricky for Bordeaux. Surprisingly, there were some good northern Rhône reds, and a handful of fine Ports too, plus it was an excellent year for top red Burgundy, not forgetting parts of the New World, notably Australia and California's Central Coast.

This is a year, then, to forget about Bordeaux for once and to focus on Chave's wonderfully scented 1991 Hermitage, as well as the Côte-Rôtie from René Rostaing, and Ridge's Montebello from the Santa Cruz Mountains. It's also a year to head to Australia and pick up a bottle or two of the exceptional 1991 Grange from Penfolds and Wynns' rich 1991 John Riddoch, both wines that need more than two decades to make that special concentration of fruit work for them.

# 30th (1986)

Breathe a sigh of relief – 1986 was a great vintage for Cabernet Sauvignon in Bordeaux, which means northern Médoc reds of great staying power. It was inconsistent in the Rhône and variable in Burgundy too, and not as good in Champagne as the fine 1985.

So my advice is to go for a first growth claret if money is no object; otherwise, Château Lynch-Bages, which is still maturing nicely today. Good Barolo and Barbaresco are drinking well, in particular the wonderful 1986 Falletto Riserva from Bruno Giacosa.

A great vintage for botrytis in Sauternes will provide some sweet memories for 30th anniversaries. The best of the bunch, Yquem perhaps apart, were the gloriously unctuous De Fargues and Climens. I bought a case of the latter and it's still going strong.

The best 30-year-old tawny Ports are imbued with magnificent rancio and nutty characters, and there isn't a better fortified wine to enjoy for a pearl anniversary than a bottle of Quinta da Noval 30 Year Old or Graham's 30 Year Old Tawny. ➤



'Stick to the
1976 Yquem
or Climens
and it will
stick to you –
or your
tongue –
happily'



# 40th (1976)

1976 wasn't much of a year to write home about in many of the classic wine regions of Europe, although there was some richness in Sauternes, some succulence in red Burgundy and it was a landmark vintage for great sweet German Riesling. It was also a vintage of true quality in Champagne.

In Bordeaux you really a need a wine with staying power, of which there weren't very many, so in the case of the first growths either Château Lafite or Cheval Blanc. Stick to the 1976 Yquem or Climens and it will stick to you – or your tongue – happily.

From Burgundy, the Clos-St-Denis from Camille Giroud is now gracefully ageing. In Champagne, the wines to look out for to celebrate a 40th birthday or anniversary are the outstandingly complex Oenothèque from Dom Pérignon and the great 1976 Krug.

The best 1976 German Rieslings are holding up well, in particular Egon Müller's immense 1976 Scharzhofberger Riesling Auslese. Nutty 40-year-old tawny Ports are harder to come by once they reach that level of maturity, but what better present for a ruby anniversary than an aged tawny, among which Taylor's, Graham's, Fonseca and Quinta do Noval have all produced wonderful bottles of fragrant, sticky toffee delight. If you can't get hold of a

40-year-old, two 20-year-olds would at least make a good and imaginative alternative.

# 50th (1966)

Who in the UK doesn't know something of 1966, even if this was a vintage year for footballing reasons rather than for wine? For 50ths and golden weddings, Bordeaux 1966 was the best vintage after 1961, but its charms have mostly faded, although it was also a good year in Port and Champagne.

Bordeaux is mostly past its best in this disappointing year, but there are two that stand head-and-shoulders above the rest, namely the classic 1966 Château Latour and the superbly concentrated Palmer – so beg, steal or borrow either of these great wines for a 50th birthday or golden wedding.

It was also a good year in Champagne, but it might be hard to get your hands on a 50-year-old bottle of vintage fizz. Since it's the 50th anniversary of Dom Ruinart's Rosé, this sensual wine is the obvious choice.

The best liquid fortified gift for a 50th would be Taylor's perfumed and remarkably fresh 1966 Single Harvest Port, made in the year in which the company's top viticulturist, Dick Yeatman, died; or, more unusually, 1966 Colheita Ports – try the velvety 1966 from Barros, or Kopke's delicately nutty version.

Above: 1966 Château Latour, Taylor's 40 Year Old Tawny, 1976 Château d'Yquem

Anthony Rose is a DWWA Regional co-Chair for Australia, a founding member of The Wine Gang, and wine correspondent for The Independent and i newspapers

# Calon • Ségur

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Grand Cru Classé en 1855



# Warming to Madeira

Heat plays an integral part in the array of styles, complexity and great longevity of the fortified wines produced on this small, sub-tropical island off the coast of northwest Africa, as Richard Mayson explains

ARIBE

IF EVER THERE was a wine to take to a desert island, it is Madeira. This is not because Madeira is an island (and it ceased to be deserted when it was discovered by the Portuguese in 1420) but because no other wine is so utterly resilient. Madeira survives heat, air and almost anything you can throw at it. Once the cork is removed, the wine comes to no harm, even if the bottle is left open and on ullage for months, even years on end. As a result you can taste an enthrallingly rich, deep and complex wine with repeated visits to the same bottle: just the wine for an island paradise.

The indefatigable nature of Madeira

wine was brought home to me earlier this year when I was carrying out research for my new book, *Madeira*, *The Islands and their Wines*. While tasting through a range of wines with Madeira's leading new-wave

producer Ricardo Diogo of the shipper Barbeito, we came across a bottle of its legendary 1795 Terrantez that had literally been forgotten in the back of a wardrobe. Not only is the 1795 remarkable in itself – I can't think of any other wine that would have survived that long – but this bottle had been left open, standing upright in Madeira's ambient warmth for 20 years. The wine was still in a good, drinkable (albeit

Left: Barbeito's 'legendary' 1795 Terrantez was bottled in the mid-1980s





altered) condition, retaining its fabulous concentration, offset by that searing streak of acidity for which great Madeira wine is famous.

## Elevated position

It is partly because Madeira is shaped by heat and air that it keeps for so long. Prolonged ageing in wood at ambient temperatures, often followed by storage in demijohn, makes the wine naturally stable (the 1795 above was only bottled in the mid-1980s). But there is also something uniquely wonderful about the terroir. Rising out of the Atlantic to a height of just under 2,000 metres, Madeira is the main island in an archipelago that is all that remains of a long-extinct volcanic hot-spot.

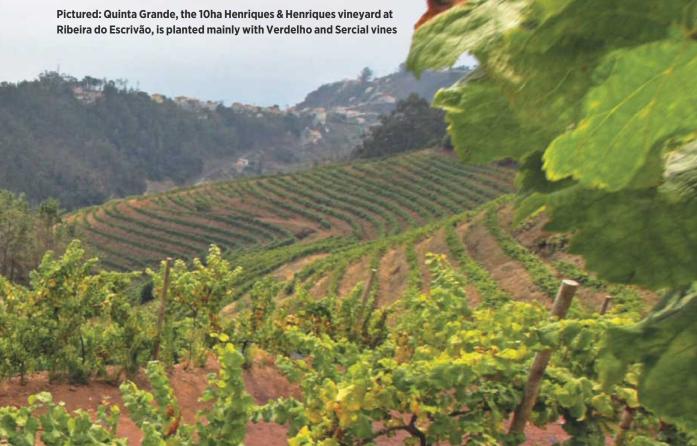
At the same latitude as the northern Sahara, you wouldn't expect Madeira to be on the world's fine wine map at all. But the altitude causes clouds to condense and rain to fall, turning the island's fertile soils into a gardener's paradise. Vines, bananas and sugar cane have competed with each other over the years as the island's most important crop, but other sub-tropical crops that also flourish at lower altitudes include mango, annona (custard apple), avocado and sweet potato.

When it comes to vines, the volcanic soils and naturally high yields produce wines with

inherently high levels of acidity. Sercial, Verdelho, Bual and Malvasia are the traditional white grape varieties, producing wines with progressive levels of sweetness. Accordingly, Sercial (known on mainland Portugal as Esgana Cão or 'dog strangler' because of its natural astringency) is grown at the highest altitudes and makes the driest and most austere wine. Verdelho, a personal favourite, grows on the north side of the island and at middling altitudes, producing aromatic, sometimes leafy, medium-dry wine. Another favourite, Bual (Boal in Portuguese) is found growing on warmer sites on the south side of the island and produces a fuller, medium-rich style of wine. My late father-in-law, Richard Blandy,

'It is
astounding
that so many
of these
wines still
retain their
youthful gloss'





the most popular) style of Madeira wine. Rich it may be, but thanks to the acidity, Malmsey is never cloying or unctuous.

Since the double-whammy of oidium and phylloxera that devastated Madeira in the 19th century, the principal grape variety on Madeira and neighbouring Porto Santo is Tinta Negra. Not only is this soft, pale red grape relatively easy to grow, it is also capable of producing all styles of wine, from sweet to dry. Tinta Negra currently accounts for about 80% of the island's production and is capable of making some very good wine on its own. Having been officially overlooked for more than a century, from 2015 onwards Tinta Negra can now appear as a variety on labels.

## Ageing gracefully

Fortified with grape spirit at 96% abv (Port is fortified with spirit at 77%), Madeira needs age to taste the way it should; maderised being the operative expression. This is always something of a handicap in the world of fortified wine, as it requires that stock be tied up for years, and sometimes decades, before bottling and sale. The way round this is an onomatopoeic process called *estufagem*, which entails heating the wines in bulk to a maximum of 55°C for a minimum of 90 days. This used to be a fairly

brutal process and many wines suffered greatly as a result. But with carefully controlled heating and cooling in stainless steel, modern *estufagem* produces wines that taste toasted rather than stewed.

The bulk of Madeira is sold at three years old having been subject to the *estufa*. Much ends up in kitchens or in France for *sauce madère*, although it is often a satisfying drink in its own right. But for progressive depth and complexity there is a hierarchy of age for blended wines, labelled from 5, 10, 15, 20, 30, 40, 50 to 'Over 50 Years Old'. For collectors, the real excitement comes from so-called *frasqueira* or 'vintage' wines, which have to be aged for at least 20 years in wood to qualify. Most are aged for considerably longer and are necessarily rare and expensive as a result.

Since 2000, a new category of dated Madeira has emerged called colheita or 'harvest'. These are effectively early-bottled vintage wines which have spent at least five years in wood and offer individuality at a more accessible price. But as I emphasise in the introduction to my book, which has tasting notes on historic Madeiras with pedigrees going back to the 18th century, there is still no substitute for age.

It is astounding that so many of these wines retain their youthful gloss, but the real joy of



Above: versatile and easy to grow, Tinta Negra is the most commonly planted grape in Madeira

Right: transferring wine between casks at the Barbeito winery in Câmara de Lobos

# Mayson's pick: 10 fascinating Madeiras to seek out



Henriques & Henriques, WS Boal NV 19.5 (98) N/A UK

www.henriquesehenriques.pt
Although without a date on
the label, this wine was
thought to be 50 years old
when inherited by the founder
of H&H in 1850. Bottled in 1927
and recorked on a number of
occasions since, it always

impresses. I last tasted it in 2014: still rich on a nose of Madeiran honey cake and parkin; a tang of marmalade on the palate, not especially sweet or rich but with wonderful texture and intensity, leading to a fine, almost delicate finish that goes on and on. Outstanding old wine. **Alcohol** 20%

Blandy's, Bual 1969 19 (96) £240 Armit, Bordeaux index, Corney & Barrow, Farr Vintners, Fine & Rare, Turville Valley Wines An outstanding year for Bual, this wine was bottled in 2013 having spent more than 40 years in cask. Shows toasted aromas, hazelnuts and dried fruit with a wisp of wood smoke; fine tawny marmalade palate, delicate initially with richness building, offset by a magnificent streak of lemon and lime acidity; long, linear and beautiful to behold. It is deeply reassuring that wines as great as this are still being bottled in Madeira. **Alc** 20%



Barbeito, Malvasia Lote 14050, 20 Year Old 18.5 (95) £79-£110 Berry Bros & Rudd, Halifax Wine Co

Bottled in tiny quantities, these lot-numbered wines are remarkable for their freshness and poise: lovely smoky nose, a touch of bonfire and old flowers; vanilla and quince marmalade, very refined with

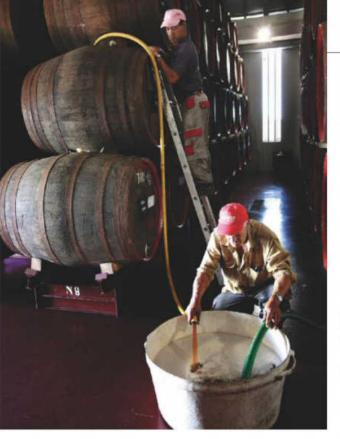
wonderful depth, yet with a lightness of touch that comes from a blend. **Alc** 20%

HM Borges, Verdelho, 20 Year Old 18 (93) N/A UK www.hmborges.com Wonderfully expressive, with slightly smoked, singed, gunflint aromas and a touch of leafiness. Toasty flavour with dried apricots and a touch of dried fig on the palate, rich yet off-dry, long and complex. An outstanding representation of this grape variety. **Alc** 20%

Henriques & Henriques, Bual, 15 Year Old 18 (93)

 $\pm 22 - \pm 29~(500 ml)$  Harrods, Hedonism, Nickolls & Perks, The Oxford Wine Co, The Wine Society

Madeira will last almost indefinitely in bottle. All wines are bottled ready to drink. As a rule of thumb, blended wines bottled with stopper corks should be drunk within five years of bottling. Colheita and vintage wines may be kept indefinitely. Bottles should be stored standing up. It is recommended that bottles with driven corks be re-corked roughly every 20 years. Wines should be served at cool room temperature unless otherwise indicated.



drinking an old Madeira is that you can have the repeated ethereal thrill of drinking a glass from the same bottle again and again.

Richard Mayson's book, Madeira, The Islands and their Wines, is published by Infinite Ideas. He is also the Decanter World Wine Awards Regional Chair for Port and Madeira

# Madeira: meet the producers

There are now just six registered shippers of Madeira wine (there having been more than 150 at the end of the 19th century). The names to reckon with today are as follows:

**Barbeito** Founded in 1946. Eclectic, individual wines, often made in small lotes (batches). remarkable for their purity and expression. Ships to Japan (Madeira goes well with sushi) and to the US, where the Historic Series is outstanding.

**D'Oliveira** Small company founded in 1850 and still in family hands. 'We have never been in a hurry to sell our wines' says Luis d'Oliveira, and consequently it has some fine, old wines. D'Oliveira recently bought out Barros e Sousa.

HM Borges Small, familyowned shipper dating back to 1877. Remarkable old wines, especially those from the 19th century (see 'Wine Legends' p138). Scandinavia is its main market.

#### Henriques & Henriques

'There are only two names in Madeira', goes the in-house joke. Wonderful wines, especially at the 10, 15 and 20 Year Old level, and good colheitas. Until recently, the only shipper with its own vineyard.

**Tustino's** The largest shipper in terms of volume. French-owned and largely supplying the French market. Younger wines are much improved in quality, especially the 10 Year Old and recent colheitas.

#### **Madeira Wine Company**

Owns some of the most famous names in the business, including Blandy, Cossart Gordon, Leacock and Miles. Now run by the seventh generation of the Blandy family. The company sits on a wonderful stock of historic wines.

Fine, fragrant aromas of fresh leaves, green tea and flowers. On the palate, it has rich toast and marmalade character yet at the same time it is gentle and beautifully concentrated, with an incisive finish. Near-perfect poise. Alc 20%



Blandy's, Colheita Sercial 1998 17.5 (91) £50-£65 Bordeaux Cellar, Bordeaux Index, Corney & Barrow, Fortnum & Mason, Hedonism One of the first of the new generation of colheitas, this is restrained on the nose, with aromas of orange peel and blossom. Initial honeyed sweetness on the palate gives

way to a savoury, nutty, almost saline, off-dry finish. Not too austere. A thoroughly civilised aperitif. Alc 20%

D'Oliveira, Colheita Terrantez 1988 17.5 (91) £67.50-£77 Farr Vintners, Highbury Vintners, **Just Fine Wines** 

This grape is as rare as hen's teeth, having been driven almost to extinction, but is still much sought-after. Fragrant and floral aromas of candied fruit and rose petals; not especially rich, with a bittersweet twist. Very fine and delicate with ravishing acidity and length. Alc 20%

Blandy's, Alvada, 5 Year Old 17 (90) £14.95-£16 Cambridge Wines, Davy's, Fortnum & Mason, Waitrose

Launched in the early 2000s, this was a radical departure for Madeira, being a 50/50 blend of Malvasia and Bual, and intended as a dessert wine. Shows lifted aromas with a touch of balsamic and a hint of mocha: smooth, seductive, figgy fruit with a touch of coconut (from ageing in new oak) towards the finish. Will be perfect with Christmas pudding or a slice of fruit cake. Alc 20%

Barbeito, Rainwater Reserva Medium **Dry, 5 Year Old** 16.5 (88) £12.95 (500ml) Roberson, Solent Cellar, The Wine Society

A fresh, lighter-weight blend of Tinta Negra (80%) and Verdelho, not subject to estufagem but aged in French oak. This boasts gentle, toasted aromas and a savoury note with a touch of citrussy acidity. Delicious served chilled as an aperitif. Alc 18%



Justino's, Colheita 1996 16 (86)

£34.99 Caviste, Ceci Paolo, Exel Wines, Leamington Wine Co, Park & Bridge, St Andrews Wine Co, Valhalla's Goat, Wine-Man Made from Tinta Negra but bottled prior to the rule change (see main text p72). Shows just how expressive this grape can be: clean,

toffee-apple character, gently rich in style, seemingly with a touch of salinity on the finish. A worthy Silver medal winner at the Decanter World Wine Awards in 2014. Alc 20%

For full details of UK stockists, see p116

# The perils of a wine lover's Christmas

From choosing the perfect wines to dealing with novelty wine gifts, and how best to dispose of bottles come recycling day, the traditional English Christmas poses a number of potential pitfalls for the wine lover. Charles Jennings and Paul Keers share their idiosyncratic view

# Buying and pairing

Buying wine for your Christmas dinner should be a treat, an ideal opportunity to indulge both your knowledge and your generosity. If only your family were as appreciative as your wine merchant...

Unfortunately your favourite high street cave is suddenly rammed with customers who last encountered a Merchant on the credits of a film with Mr Ivory. It's impossible to enjoy the most important bottle shopping trip of your year because the sales assistants are monopolised by all of these first-time buyers.

Presuming you come away with a few choice bottles, or have cherry-picked a selection from the cellar, now you have to deal with the Christmas dinner – which, of course, is an impossible meal for matching. Forget about pairing with the turkey; your

carefully chosen wine will be trying to hold its own against a cranberry sauce that attacks your palate like jam, and a bread sauce that smothers every other flavour with the blandness of wallpaper paste. It's all right for Cliff Richard – he just pairs his wine with mistletoe.

So pragmatists simply match the wine to the occasion, and go traditional: a nice old Burgundy or Bordeaux. After all, when Dickens wrote *A Christmas Carol*, he didn't envisage a Christmas Yet To Come involving wine from countries populated by either separatists or convicts.

And not to forget, crucially, a bottle of Pol Roger to start proceedings. When you tell everyone it was Churchill's favourite Champagne, that will give you an opportunity for plenty of quips regarding the day's battles ahead. With perhaps a glass held back for a nightcap when it's all over. As Winston said, in victory you deserve it – in defeat, you need it. **PK** 



# The presents

There are two kinds of gift: wine (which you might want) and wine-related artefacts (which you almost certainly won't). The wine, at least, is fairly easy to manage. Faced with a well-intentioned but basically horrific bottle of Paraguayan Shiraz, you seize it with a well-practised leer and cry: 'Splendid! I look forward to drinking this at my leisure!' before burying it under a sofa cushion and walking away.

The artefacts, though – the gadgets and accessories that your nearest and dearest assume you can't live without – these are harder to finesse into non-existence, not least because the giver is often sitting right opposite you, just dying for you to give the gift a first try. We've seen a number of these over the years.

# Serving

It's all going horribly wrong. You're heading into the main course, but Auntie Janet is still drinking the Chablis you served with the starter, and doesn't want to move on to red. And Grandma has asked whether that nice yellow wine over on the sideboard is the one she had with pudding last year and if so, could she have some now because it was so lovely and sweet? (Well yes, that's one way of describing Suduiraut...)

Serving the red wine in decanters means that, sadly, the guests will not see the provenance of your grand cru classé. Don't worry; the label would have been of little interest to them as it

doesn't feature conversational topics like animals or supposedly entertaining puns. And someone would only have upset you by remarking that '1989 is a bit old, isn't it? Don't you have something fresher?'

However, it does mean that all of the said Bordeaux in decanter number one can be kept within arm's reach — your arm's reach — and served only to those who would really appreciate it. Primarily yourself. The teenagers and hoi polloi are drinking Good Ordinary Claret from other decanters planted further down the table.

But the teenagers have already got through more than you had bargained for, and are looking thirstily around for more. Is that young man really going to the loo, or heading for your cellar? And your spouse is questioning the number of wines you've lined up. 'Oh, is there a special wine that goes with the cheese, then?' Of course there is. It 'goes' with the cheese in the same way that knives do. Or would people like to enjoy their cheese with their dessert spoon?

Oh goodness – Uncle Charles, do you know the Bishop of Norwich? I said, do you... never mind, could you just pass the Port? No, not that way... **PK** 

Some are almost but not quite useful: the wine aerator, the sonic decanter. Some are merely tiresome – silver-plated bungs with mottos like 'Life is a Cabernet'; especially galling is 'I'm not old, I'm vintage!' And some are simply terrible – for example, a plastic wine glass with a light in the foot that changes colour, or a Bill Clinton novelty corkscrew with the screw emerging from Bill's crotch (yes, seriously). All of them are wrong; some, very wrong.

Actually, I lie: I deeply covet the wine glass with the light, but then so would you, if you saw it. As for the rest? Well, there may be no way out. Just man up, get a grip and tell yourself, as you cheerfully use it once and once only for the benefit of the giver, that it's only a corkscrew. And it's not really Bill's crotch. **CJ** 



# The aftermath

In the closing hours of Christmas Day, the situation begins to reveal itself: drifts of discarded wrapping paper; the wreckage of the turkey; the Stilton that no one can bring themselves to eat; and, of course, countless empty and half-empty bottles.

Where did they all come from? How can there be so many? And how to get rid of them? This is not as straightforward as it ought to be, especially if, like PK, you're socially hypernervous. What, he asks himself, will the neighbours think on recycling collection day — not so much of the quantity, but of the quality? What judgments will they leap to?

It's a terrible pressure, and it obliges him to spend time outside in the bitter night, arranging the Lynch-Bages and the Beychevelles on top of the recycling heap, and hiding the rubbish below, artlessly, as though Nature had done the work for him.

I, on the other hand, have a much more elemental problem: there is just an awful lot of bottles, and none of them, frankly, bears scrutiny. To any passer-by it must look as if we've spent three days ram-raiding the nearest Tesco Superstore before frantically drinking the evidence in a frenzy of shame. Which, in many ways, we have.

Nothing to be done about it, of course. The bottles are there, heaped up, occasionally tinkling to the ground as the breeze knocks the uppermost ones off, like an ice face breaking away on Mont Blanc.

Possible solutions? Keep the majority of the dead bottles somewhere in the house and drip-feed them to the relevant authorities until they're all gone, and if it takes until February, it takes until February. Or: nip round to PK's and put the worst offenders prominently in his recycling box. Don't think I wouldn't. **CJ** 

CJ and PK are authors of Sediment: Two Gentlemen and their Mid-Life Terroirs, which won the John Avery Award in the 2015 André Simon Food & Drink Book Awards. They also write www.sedimentblog.com











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Since it was founded in 2000, the Grandes Pagos de España, a group of niche producers from all corners of Spain, have promoted the concept of single-vineyard wines through their own carefully crafted examples, aiming to highlight the individual personality that can only be drawn from specific terroirs. Make sure to reserve your place in this fascinating masterclass and discover these premium single-vineyard estates. Speaker: Pedro Ballesteros Torres MW, DWWA Regional co-Chair for Spain & Sherry

- Vintages to be confirmed
- Abadia Retuerta, Pago Valdebellón, Ribera del Duero
- · Alonso del Yerro, Maria, Ribera del Duero
- Cortijo Los Aguilares, Tadeo, Sierras de Málaga
- Enrique Mendoza, Estrecho, Alicante
- Fillaboa, Monte Alto, Rías Baixas
- Gramona, Celler Batlle, Catalonia

- | Chivite, Chardonnay 125, Navarra
- · Mas Doix, 1902, Priorat
- Mustiguillo, Quincha Corral, El Terrerazo
- · Palacio Quemado, Los Acilates, Ribera del Guadiana
- Secastilla, Somontano
- Valdespino, Ynocente, Jerez

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A series of informal tutored tastings featuring six great wines per session. Tickets are sold separately from Grand Tasting tickets.

11.30am: Recaredo - long-aged premium cavas

Ipm: The diverse terroirs of Priorat and Montsant

2.30pm: Spanish premium wines from Albariño to Tempranillo



## 1.30pm: The Douro Boys - flying the flag for the Douro

Recognised as among Portugal's leading producers, The Douro Boys are a group of five estates: Quinta do Vallado, Niepoort, Quinta do Crasto, Quinta Vale D Maria and Quinta do Vale Meão. This a golden opportunity to meet these mavericks and learn about the historic Douro region and how its dramatic landscape, soils and climate have shaped its wines. With a focus on whites, you will taste a host of unique varieties and blends and be able to discuss these wines and Ports with the winemakers themselves. Speakers:Tomas Roquette, owner of Quinta do Crasto; Cristiano Van Zeller, owner of Quinta Vale D Maria; and Dirk Van de Niepoort, owner and winemaker of Niepoort

- Niepoort, Tiara 2014
- Quinta do Vallado, Branco Reserva 2014
- Quinta do Vallado, Tinto Reserva Field Blend 2013
- Quinta do Crasto, Touriga Nacional 2012
- Quinta Vale D Maria 2012

- Quinta Vale D Maria, Vinha da Francisca 2012
- Quinta do Crasto, Vinha da Ponte 2012
- Quinta do Vale Meão 2013
- Niepoort, Colheita 1995

#### 4pm: The evolution of Ribera del Duero

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This is a rare chance to taste some of Spain's finest reds. Five top estates will showcase the evolution of the historic Ribera del Duero region through their wines. From the pioneering Tinto Pesquera of Alejandro Fernández and the Pérez Pascuas brothers and their Viña Pedrosa estate, to the modern Aalto, Emilio Moro and legendary Pagos de los Capellanes, each of these leading producers will highlight diverse, terroir-driven expressions of a single yet complex grape variety: Tempranillo.

Chaired by Sarah Jane Evans MW, DWWA Regional co-Chair for Spain & Sherry Speakers: Paco Casa, winemaker of Pago de los Capellanes; Miguel Angel Bocos, export manager of Pesquera; and Jorge Monje, assistant winemaker of Viña Pedrosa

- \* Vintages to be confirmed
- Aalto 2009
- Aalto, PS 2005
- Alejandro Fernández, Tinto Pesquera Millenium\*
- Alejandro Fernández, Tinto Pesquera Alenza\*
- Emilio Moro, Valderramiro 2003

- Emilio Moro, Sanchomartín 2003
- Pago de los Capellanes, Parcela el Picón 1999
- Pago de los Capellanes, Parcela El Nogal 2003
- Pérez Pascuas, Gran Selección 2004
- Viña Pedrosa, Reserva 1999

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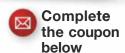
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# The *Decanter* guarantee

Our buying guide is here to provide you with trusted, independent, expert recommendations on what to buy, what to drink and what to cellar.

Each panel tasting is judged by three experienced tasters chosen for their authority in the category of wine being rated. All wines are tasted blind and are pre-poured for judges in flights of 8 to 10 wines. Our three experts taste and score their set of wines individually but then discuss their scores together at the end of each flight. Any wines on which scores are markedly different are retasted; however judges are under no obligation to amend their scores.

Judges are encouraged to look for typicity in wines, rewarding those which are true to their region. Prices are not revealed, and thus not taken into consideration when scoring.

The tastings are held in the controlled environment of *Decanter*'s tasting suite – a plain white room, with natural light and no noise. We limit the number of wines tasted to a manageable level – a maximum of 85 per day – allowing judges to taste more thoroughly and avoid palate fatigue.

## **Scoring system**

Tasters rate the wines using the 20-point scoring system, in increments of 0.5pts; however, we also publish the 100-point equivalent. The overall *Decanter* rating is the average of all three judges' scores. For example, If a wine averages 18.5 points or more, the wine is automatically awarded *Decanter*'s 'Outstanding' rating. The ratings are set out below:

20 pts	Rating	100 pts
18.5-20	Outstanding	95-100
17-18.5	Highly	90-94
	Recommended	
15-16.75	Recommended	83-89
13-14.75	Fair	76-82
11-12.75	Poor	70-75+
10.75 and	Faulty	69 and
below		below

To see the entire scoring conversion chart, go to Decanter.com/buyingguide. For the 'Outstanding' Decanter rating, judges' individual scores and tasting notes are listed in addition to the average score. For the 'Highly Recommended' and 'Recommended' wines, individual and average scores are also listed but tasting notes are a combination of the three judges' notes. We plan to post all individual tasting notes for all the wines tasted on Decanter.com. Due to technical issues, we are not able to do that for this month's panel tastings but are looking to put this in place in the near future.

# Decanter BUYING GUIDE

## This month's panel tastings

Gigondas, Champagne Brut Nature & Extra Brut, and Sauternes & Barsac



# **80** Spurrier's World

Consultant editor Steven Spurrier gives us a rundown of his travels and tastings this month



## **83** Gigondas 83 wines tasted; 2 Outstanding

Complexity and authentic local character from a region offering increasingly good value

# **93** Champagne Brut Nature & Extra Brut

#### 57 wines tasted; 0 Outstanding

Our tasters find good quality across the board in the super-dry category that divides opinion



# **101** Sauternes & Barsac 33 wines tasted; 3 Outstanding

The 2011s come out just ahead of the 2013s in this assessment of two highly rated vintages

# **110** Expert's Choice: Chilean Rhône varieties

#### By Peter Richards MW

A revival of interest in old-vine Carignan is inspiring a new wave of gutsy, savoury reds

**112** Weekday wines

116 UK stockists



# Spurrier's World

Decanter's globetrotting consultant editor gives us a round-up of recent tastings, his views on current issues in the wine world and top bottles to drink or keep

## Upping the pace

Early autumn is the busiest time for trade tastings and this year saw exporters and importers, wholesalers and retailers in optimistic form, while a very good vintage, already likened by many to 1985, was underway across the Channel. A joint-venture event between Argentina and Chile saw the neighbours across the Andes out in force over two days, with exciting wines at all prices and always lots of new discoveries alongside the classics. These two countries are where Australia and New Zealand were in the 1990s: moving inexorably from variety to vineyard as an expression in the bottle.

Fortified highlight

An event not to miss was the Great Sherry Tasting, with more than 200 different Sherries from an eclectic range of importers, despite the sadly continuing decline in sales in the UK. Presented by Beltran Domeca, president of the Comité Regional, the range from the driest finos to the richest olorosos has never been broader, and the quality never more strikingly individual. And yet Sherry is going the way of German Rieslings - also never of finer quality - into the understanding hands of specialist merchants and innovative wine bars.

The most impressive range came from Peter Dauthieu of Viniberia, whose base is in Jerez itself. Special bottlings from the almacenista (or stock holder) bodegas he knows well are sold to Majestic

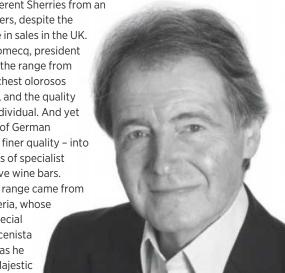
'Two of the tastings confirmed that the independent sector is still alive and well' under his Pedro label (fino £8.99, amontillado £9.99. palo cortado £14.99, oloroso £11.99) are of genuine quality, while his often single-cask selections from historic family cellars are in a class of their own. Available from The Wine Society, the six-year-old fino ('what fino was before technology arrived, just 14.9% abv') showed purity and bite (£13.95); the 20-year-old amontillado had great energy, flavour and length (£22 for 37.5cl); and the outstanding 35-year-old palo cortado ('an armchair wine') a bright amber colour and dense, spirity flavours (£24 for 37.5cl).

## Impressive independents

Two of the many tastings confirmed that the independent sector is still alive and well. The Dirty Dozen tasting brings together The Wine Treasury, Hallowed Ground, Aubert & Mascoli, Indigo Wine, Top Selection, Roberson, Raymond Reynolds, Clark Foyster, H2Vin, Astrum Wine Cellars, Flint Wines and FortyFive10. Their buyers are regular and valued judges at the Decanter World Wine Awards and a brief glance at their websites will show a vast range of hand-picked suppliers.

The Bunch tasting, meanwhile, showcases the ranges from Adnams, Berry Bros & Rudd, Corney & Barrow, Lea & Sandeman, Tanners and Yapp Brothers. Their wines often feature on these pages, and they need no introduction as conservative innovators.

A newcomer is Red Squirrel Wine, founded by Nik Darlington in 2012 and named after the increasingly rare rodent species. Beginning as an online retailer, it has now expanded into importing and wholesaling, without losing the founding aim of seeking out local wines from native grapes. Among an inspiring range of



# Steven recommends... (for full details of UK stockists, see p116)



**Janisson & Fils, Brut Tradition, Champagne, France NV** 17.5 (91)

£32-£38 Fenwicks, Harrogate Fine Wine Co, Blue Otter, Seriously Good Wine, Champagne Warehouse From the grand cru village of Verzenay, this 70% Pinot Noir, 30% Chardonnay blend with 22% reserve wines shows real class. Drink 2016-2018 Alc 12%



Salomon Undhof, Alma Riesling, Kremstal, **Austria 2013** 17.5 (91)

£18.75 Lea & Sandeman Fermented for seven weeks in buried amphorae, racked into small tanks in the spring and lightly clarified. Lemony flavours, quite rich with stone fruit and quince acidity. A fascinating wine. Drink 2016-2018 Alc 13.5%



**Henry & Jean-**Sébastien Marionnet, La Pucelle de Romorantin, Touraine, France 2013 17 (90)

£19 The Wine Society Cuttings from vines planted in 1850 have revived Romorantin in the Upper Loire: green summer fruits with rapier-like acidity and purity. Drink 2016-2018 Alc 11.5%

wines, it's years since I tasted a red Tibouren from Provence and I have never previously come across a white Roter Veltliner from Austria.

## Anniversary line-ups

Two important milestones were celebrated: the 30th anniversary of New Zealand's Cloudy Bay, and the 125th anniversary of the founding of Spain's La Rioja Alta.

Montana was the first to plant Sauvignon Blanc in Marlborough on its Brancott Estate in 1973, but it was the combined talents of David Hohnen and Kevin Judd that gave Cloudy Bay instant success from the 1985 vintage. Five Sauvignon Blancs were tasted pre-dinner: a not-yet released 2015, showing florality and stone fruits, combining ripeness and minerality; a more exotic, partly barrel-fermented 2010; a buttery/leesy 1998, still very much alive; a complex, dry Sauternes-like 1992; and an amazing 1987 with a hint of sweetness. Then came four Pinot Noirs: a brilliant 2010 with a great future; a 2003 showing youth and finesse; a riper 2001 with more vigour and depth; and a 1998, young in colour but dry on the palate.

With dinner at Spring, Somerset House, Sauvignon Blanc 2003 and the finer, barrel-aged Te Koko 2012 accompanied the seared scallops, while with the roast squab we compared jeroboams of Pinot Noir 2007 from Marlborough and the Te Wahi 2010 from Central Otago, my vote going to the former. The surprise of the evening: a 2009 Late Harvest Riesling (see below) went superbly with the pear and hazelnut tart.

The La Rioja Alta dinner, a black-tie affair at The Orangery, Kensington Palace, showed a range of Riojas from the producer's own 425ha estate that had me reaching for my cheque book: a youthful Viña Alberdi 2008; a marvellous Viña Aranda 2006 with seamless ageing in oak from its own barrel maker; a superb Viña Ardanza 2007, all black fruits, warmth and grip; a stunning 2005 Gran Reserva 904 with total depth and balance; and finally, magnums of 2001 Gran Reserva 890, one of the greatest Riojas I have ever tasted.

Steven Spurrier is Decanter's consultant editor and a renowned taster

## From the cellar

## Masi single-vineyard Amarones

MASE

Masi is the name of the Boscaini family estates outside Verona, now managed by the seventh generation and consistently producing some of the region's best Amarones, Comparing Campolongo di Torbe and Mazzano - two prime single vineyards that share the 70% Corvina, 25% Rondinella, 5% Molinara plantings - from 2009 to 1988 was a revelation. The 2009 Campolongo was rich and Port-like, the Mazzano more grippy and lifted; the natural richness of Campolongo

2007 put it slightly ahead of the more floral Mazzano, while the latter

streaked ahead with its brambly bitter cherry fruit in 2003, and stayed ahead with elegance over robustness in both the 2001 and 2000 vintages, confirming this yet again with a youthfully dense

> **1997**. But moving on to **1990**, Campolongo's vigorous elegance defeated the more easy-going Mazzano, while it was the Mazzano that just had the edge in 1988. (Prices and stockists available from Berkmann Wine Cellars.)

## For the cellar **Graich Hills Estate**

Founded from scratch in 1977 by Miljenko 'Mike' Grgich and Austin Hills, Grgich Hills now farms 144ha across five estates in the heart of the Napa Valley. Now 92 years old, Mike was joined in 1986 by his nephew Ivo Jeramaz as winemaker. Ivo continues to put the vineyards before the cellar, and a recent tasting proved the value of this approach. A 100% Sauvignon 2013 Fumé Blanc (£30) showed elegance and juicy precision, with complexity to come; while the 2012 Chardonnay (£39) had florality, white and yellow summer fruits, really good through to 2020. For the reds, the

2012 Calistoga Zinfandel (£34) was bright, briary and brambly, with lift and spice on the palate, lovely for the next five years. Two Merlots (both £39): a robust, slightly raisiny 2010 and a more elegant 2011 from a cooler year, both good if not great, while greatness was evident in the 2012 Cabernet Sauvignon (£53.50), its rich spicy fruit and firm finish enjoyable for another 10 years. (Available from Planet of the Grapes; contact importer ABS Wine Agencies for other stockists.)



## **Joel & Romain Champet, Côte-Rôtie** La Viallière, Rhône, France 2012 18 (93)

£33 Yapp Bros

From 3ha on the higher slopes in the north of the appellation, fermented in concrete, bottled unfined and unfiltered after 18 months in demi-muids. Classic. Drink 2018-2028 Alc 12.5%



## Garage Wine Co, **Ploughman Farmer** Carignan, Maule Valley, Chile 2012 17.25 (90+)

£24.95 St Andrews Wine Co, Walker & Wodehouse

Just six barrels were made from a field blend of old Carignan. It shows surprising freshness, dry herbal fruit and lovely clarity. Drink 2016-2020 Alc 14%



## **Cloudy Bay, Late Harvest** Riesling, Marlborough, **New Zealand 2009** 18 (93)

£21 (375ml) Harvey Nichols Fermented in barrel for 10 months in order to allow the 115g/I residual sugar to blend in with the natural, vibrant acidity, revealing a tarte tatin richness and endless length. Drink 2016-2020 Alc 10.5%

# **Decanter TASTING**



# Discoveries from Greece, Italy and Bulgaria

Tuesday 2 February 2016 • Institute of Directors, London SWI

#### Explore the ancient origins of winemaking from these Southern European regions

We are delighted to welcome back a selection of small, independent producers from Greece, Italy and Bulgaria for this exceptional tasting of premium Mediterranean wines. Discover emerging regions and journey back to the roots of winemaking in the impressive, period surroundings of London's Institute of Directors.

I I am — I 2pm Trade Masterclass with Konstantinos Lazarakis MW: Discover wines from Greece, Italy and Bulgaria.





#### TRADE TASTING

I Iam – I2pm MasterclassI Iam – 4.30pm Trade TastingRegistration required

#### **CONSUMER TASTING**

6pm – 8pm Consumer Tasting
Tickets £25 per person

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# **Gigondas**

With its great diversity of terroirs, this southern Rhône appellation is now producing wines of finesse, as well as true local character, says John Livingstone-Learmonth

IF THE SOUTHERN Rhône were a ship travelling west, the bow would be Tavel, the foredeck would be Châteauneuf-du-Pape and the bridge would be Gigondas. When atrocious weather comes from the Cévennes hills it is Tavel and Châteauneuf that bear the brunt, as they did with high levels of rainfall in 2014.

Gigondas, from its raised position in the eastern side of the Vaucluse, experienced a much drier 2014. With autumns warm and clement recently, its late-ripening profile means that the vineyard flourishes during September. Cropping in October is frequent, a full three to four weeks later than in much of Châteauneuf.

With vineyards spread across a range of soils, and in very different locations, there is a healthy mosaic that contributes to the quality and character of a bottle of Gigondas. The low levels on the approach to the village are classic garrigue, marl with some clay soils, producing robust, good-hearted wines. A little above them lies a stretch of sand that provides elegant wines.

Close to, and just behind the village are limestone and marl soils, furnishers of restrained wines, with Syrah performing well. Away from the village are the peaks of the Dentelles de Montmirail, an area only first planted to the vine in the 1970s. Here limestone is the key influence, bringing crispness and nerve. In the north are the two other prime zones: around Domaine Les Pallières, where there is compacted sand called *safre* giving wines of the utmost elegance; and Romane, a clay zone at 450m.

#### Strength of character

Grenache is the core variety, though it has fallen from more than 90% of plantings in the early 1970s to about 65% to 75% now. The first lieutenant is Syrah, all the better thanks to some of the area's intrinsic freshness. Due to warmer years, Mourvèdre now ripens more than it used to, increasing its popularity. A glass of Gigondas should provide a stimulating mix of plum or prune fruit, dark berries, spice, pepper and dried herbs. These are genuine, fresh, often well-priced wines, and finesse rather than raw strength quite rightly features in the appraisal of a Gigondas, be it young or mature.

With hot summers such as 2009, 2010 and 2015 in mind, the mentality of growers in handling such issues is crucial. Fortunately, the winemaking curse of trying to make wines with 'sucrosity' has not hit Gigondas: it would be a contradiction, given the natural inclination here to clear flavours. Likewise, there has not been a rush to load the wines with new oak, so drinkers find wines that capture the complexities of a warm Provençal landscape, with the various soil prompts adding to the variety on display. An innate balance from the region's freshness means that the wines live extremely well.

John Livingstone-Learmonth is the DWWA Regional Chair for Rhône and publisher of www.drinkrhone.com



# **Gigondas: know your vintages**

2015 Excellent. Deeply coloured, full, long wines. Heaps of potential.

2014 Good. Rounded wines with charming fruit, and some good body.

2013 Good. Slow-burn wines that need time to fuse rocky tannins.

2012 Good. Easy-drinking, cool wines displaying pure fruit.

2011 Good, but high alcohol levels can interfere with the wines' balance.

2010 Excellent. Depth, freshness,

flair and complexity. Long life ahead.

2009 Very good. Robustly built, sunswept, lengthy wines.

2008 Good. Lovely drinking from a much underrated year.

2007 Very good. Punchy, powerful wines with dense Grenache at the core.

2006 Good. Well-fruited wines, a lovely, balanced drinking year.

2005 Very good. Tannic, dark wines that are slow to unfurl.

## **Gigondas: the facts**

Surface area 1,220 hectares Grape varieties Grenache (50%-85%), Syrah, Mourvèdre (40%-50%). Other grapes permitted: (red) includes Cinsault, Counoise, Muscardin, Terret Noir; (white) includes Clairette, Roussanne, Grenache Blanc, Marsanne, Picpoul, Viognier **Yield** 36 hl/ha

Annual bottle production about 5 million Producers 80 domaines, three co-ops ➤

# The results

Consistency and freshness were the themes of the day for our experts, who were impressed by the local character and accessibility evident in these Grenache-dominated wines. Christelle Guibert reports

WITH 92% OF the wines recommended, John Livingstone-Learmonth described Gigondas as a 'very reliable source of genuine wines'. Marcel Orford-Williams echoed his view, and Simon Field MW felt the tasting showed the potential of the appellation: 'Gigondas has a lot going for it: a wonderful location; varying terroir at different levels; the Dentelles de Montmirail behind, with the limestone backdrop; and the northwest exposure, with altitudes up to 600m.' Orford-Williams agreed: 'Gigondas has this wonderful ability to produce wines with freshness, regardless of vintage and regardless of quality. That seam of freshness was present throughout this tasting.' Livingstone-Learmonth added: 'Gigondas has never fallen into the trap of chasing excess ripeness and sugar.'

The southern Rhône may have a wide range of appellations, but as Orford-Williams says: 'It is built on a sort of cascade system, with Châteauneuf-du-Pape at the top followed by Gigondas, then Vacqueyras, Cairanne and so on. Each appellation is different, though there's one grape that tends to unite them all: Grenache.'

# 'There were plenty of finely crafted, elegant and poised examples' Simon Field MW

Field sees a bright future: 'Gigondas now has the Perrins leading the pack - they are demonstrating what can be done in the area.' Orford-Williams admitted: 'As a wine buyer, I'm spending more time in Gigondas than I have in the past. That is partly to do with Châteauneufdu-Pape - while it still makes outstanding wine, prices have risen quite dramatically. Gigondas seems to have found its place, and our sales go up every year.'

The panel was pleasantly struck by the consistency of the wines. Livingstone-Learmonth found 'not too many flaws or nasties, dead animals', concluding that there were 'not too many stars, but a lot of good wines'. Field felt that consumers have got Gigondas wrong: 'It is often associated with tough, rustic, hard to appreciate wines, but today the wines weren't like that at all.'

## The scores

83 wines tasted

Outstanding

14 Highly recommended

Recommended

6 Fair

Poor

()**Faulty** 

# The tasters' verdicts

# Simon Field MW



Field joined Berry Bros & Rudd in 1998, having spent several years as a chartered accountant in London. He is responsible for purchasing wines from the Rhône as well as Champagne, Languedoc-Roussillon, Germany, England and Sherry. He became a Master of Wine in 2002.

#### Field's verdict

'Gigondas has long been the Dauphin, hitherto uncrowned, the monarch firmly

ensconced in the summer palace of Châteauneuf-du-Pape... But is the local hierarchy at last set to evolve, finally to eschew indulgent, alcoholic styles of turbo-charged Grenache, its progress well suited to the cooler vineyards in the hills? Gigondas is small, at significantly less than half the size of its influential sibling, yet it has wonderful and diverse terroir. Oddly, therefore, but irrefutably, it has a reputation for rusticity and raw power, for assertive and unforgiving styles, almost antithetical to the theoretical potential of its privileged position. A lot is at stake, clearly, and this tasting offered a real opportunity to start to show the world what it can do. And I'm pleased to advise that the verdict is generally very favourable. Despite the youth of the majority of the samples, there were plenty of finely crafted, elegant and poised examples, wines which did not lack for Mediterranean warmth, but which were, in general, well-made and not overblown or beset with unforced error. A quietly assertive performance, overall, the bar evidently now set higher than before.'

# John Livingstone-Learmonth



Livingstone-Learmonth is the DWWA Regional Chair for the Rhône. He first visited the region in 1973, and has since authored four books, including The Wines of the Northern Rhône, which won the Louis Roederer International Book Prize in 2006. He also publishes Drinkrhone.com.

Livingstone-Learmonth's verdict Gigondas does a good job of supplying wines that often have a true local

identity: they are therefore fresh, the result of a combination of west-facing vineyards, altitude and, for some, a pronounced limestone influence. This tasting was right up to the mark in offering wines that were authentic across both the 2012 and 2013 vintages. 2012 is a vintage that bears stylish fruit and largely smooth tannins; here the best 2012s had flair, and a harmony that will appeal to a broad public.

2013 is more cussed and chiselled than 2012: it is a year for patience, while its rocky notes absorb into the main frame of the wines. On this showing, the 2013s have started to move on from their early rawness, and are beginning to become more filled and less linear.

There were few technical faults, and a welcome absence of oak in the profile of nearly all the wines; alcohol levels were never heady. The one disappointment were the already-bottled 2014s, which I found dull. Gigondas merits more than a hasty bottling in a fruit-filled vintage, especially when the fruit lacks the bright vibrations of the leading wines, and when there is also a lack of carry and depth in their content.

Orford-Williams felt the alcohol was in better balance than the neighbouring appellation: 'In Châteauneuf-du-Pape there is a problem, because grapes tend to ripen to excess, and also much earlier. One always forgets that there is almost a month's difference in harvest between Gigondas and Châteauneuf-du-Pape, and that's a benefit to Gigondas.'

The vintages tasted also provided some great contrasts, with 2013 and 2012 the stars of the show. Livingstone-Learmonth found the 2013 to have 'more content, tannin and drive'. Despite Field's mixed perception of 2013 as a vintage, he agreed: 'The interplay between acidity and tannin worked well. The 2012s had a bit more depth, length and character.' The tasters found the 2014 wines to be simple and forward, though Orford-Williams pointed out that 'the better ones are still in cask'.

Overall, the panel was of a single mind. Field found the younger wines 'surprisingly approachable', while Livingstone-Learmonth predicted that some will keep going into the late 2020s and early 2030s: 'Gigondas lives far better than many people think. The more traditional styles suit country foods, such as stews and game, but the more fruit-led styles go nicely with dishes such as duck breast'.

**Entry criteria:** producers and UK agents were invited to submit their most recent available vintages. and a maximum of two wines each

# Outstanding 18.5-20pts (95-100pts)



#### **Domaine de Coyeux 2012**

Decanter average score: 18.5/20pts (95/100pts) Individual judges' scores: Simon Field MW 18.5 John Livingstone-Learmonth 18.5 Marcel Orford-Williams 18.5

#### £28 Hallgarten Druitt & Novum, Vin Cognito

Former owner Yves Nativelle built up this estate – in the beautiful heights of Beaumes-de-Venise, around the back of the Dentelles - to more than 60ha of Muscat, with a small patch of Gigondas and some Beaumes red. However the decision to paint a cellar beam resulted in an airborne bacterial infection that lasted years, with the wines slipping off the radar and the vineyard suffering neglect. Sold in 2013, the de Feraudy brothers are reviving it; the 2012 Gigondas is a juicy, stylish wine with notes of pine and lavender.

Simon Field MW A bold and uncompromising style; tannins and menthol character are both in evidence. Shows dark fruit and savoury power that are held nicely in suspension.

John Livingstone-Learmonth Swish Gigondas with swashbuckling flair. The nose will give plenty in time; for now there are hints of blue fruit and iodine. Expressive, with bright berry fruit and precise tannins.

Marcel Orford-Williams Boasts a full palate that is both rich and compact. This flows nicely into a long, sweet finish.

Drink 2017-2030 Alcohol 14%



## Pierre Amadieu, Domaine Grand Romane 2013

18.5 (95) **SF** 18.5 **JLL** 18.75 **MOW** 18.5

#### £19.95-£24 AC Gallie, Champagnes & Châteaux, Love Wine

This lonely, high, almost abstract vineyard represents the dream and foresight of Pierre Amadieu, who planted vines and olives, and grazed sheep here for the benefit of their droppings in the early 1950s. 65% Grenache (planted in 1950) and 20% Mourvèdre (1985, some 1952) provide a wonderful platform. The Mourvèdre undergoes carbonic maceration, and a mix of new oak casks and large old 30hl barrels give a wine that's clean, long and grounded, gaining local imprint as it ages.

SF Pleasing nose of wood smoke, cloves, cassis and incense. The palate has an unexpected dimension of sweetness that works well with the relatively austere, spicy finish. Very complete and very agreeable.

**JLL** The nose combines garrigue herbs with plum fruit, and has a baked aspect about it. The palate serves compressed juice, gives an image of herbs and small, compact grapes; a walk in the vineyards in October. Its depth comes from within. Really assured, with understated persistence.

MOW Shows gorgeous spice on the palate and nose. There is real lift here. It's lovely and I love it.

Drink 2017-2030 Alc 14.5% >>

# Marcel Orford-Williams



Orford-Williams joined The Wine Society as a buyer in 1986, with his specialist areas including the Rhône. In recognition of his services to French wine, he was made a Chevalier de l'Ordre du Mérite Agricole in 2010.

#### Orford-Williams' verdict

'I don't think I've ever tasted as many Gigondas wines at one sitting before. There were no real surprises: I fully

expected the wines to deliver everything promised by this appellation, and I wasn't disappointed. The 2012 and 2013 vintages both showed well, with 2013 maybe a little more taut. There was an excellent standard overall - nothing corky and nothing oxidised, and just one wine where I suspected brettanomyces.

Gigondas is not new, even if there is little history of estate bottlings, but there was a sense of assuredness here that was quite remarkable. Nothing seemed forced or over-extracted, and the use of oak was well-judged. Commercially, there is growing interest in Gigondas, partly because it is seen to offer good value. There are now several very good estates making very good, characterful wine.

Though Gigondas is probably seen as second-tier after Châteauneuf-du-Pape - Grenache is, after all, a key ingredient in both - the reality is that they are quite different. Gigondas, even at quite high alcohol levels, always manages to retain freshness, and here this was evident across the board.'

# Highly Recommended 17-18.25pts (90-94pts)



## Le Plan des Moines, Les Vendangeuses 2013 17.75 (92)

**SF** 17.5 **JLL** 18 **MOW** 18

£16.99 villeneuve

The nose has a supple coating of berry fruit and is fragrant, with some spicy Mourvèdre. The palate runs with vivacity and is well-choreographed and quite aromatic on the finish. A stealthy and polished wine. **Drink** 2017-2029 **Alc** 14.5%



# **Pierre Amadieu, Le Pas de l'Aigle 2012** 17.75 (92) SF 17.5 JLL 18 MOW 18

£23.95 AC Gallie, Love Wine

A big, confident and somewhat assertive style. There is an innate oiliness that speaks well of the south. The palate runs with gourmet fruit, and has a tasty paradise at its centre. Dramatic Gigondas! **Drink** 2017-2031 **Alc** 15%



# Domaine Notre Dame des Pallières, Bois des Mourres 2012

17.5 (91) **SF** 17.5 **JLL** 17.5 **MOW** 17.5

N/A UK www.pallieres.com

Prune and dark berry depth on the nose, a note of black olives. The acidity is natural and naturally impressive, and the finish, with its notes of pine fennel and crème de cassis, is promising. Modern, with a touch of finesse.

Drink 2017-2029 Alc 14.5%



# Alain Jaume & Fils, Terrasses de Montmirail 2013 17.25 (90+)

**SF** 17 **JLL** 17.25 **MOW** 17.5

N/A UK www.vignobles-alain-jaume.com
Black berry fruit in a sunny style on the nose, a touch of sea salt and hints of bay. Playful palate with a savoury backdrop and striking tannins. Needs some time, but is gorgeous, as in drop-dead! **Drink** 2017-2029 **Alc** 14.5%

'Gigondas always
manages to retain
freshness, and here
this was evident
across the board'
Marcel Orford-Williams



#### Domaine de la Maurelle 2013

17.25 (90+) **SF** 17 **JLL** 16.5 **MOW** 18

£16 Montrachet

A hint of clear raspberry in a brewed nose, veering towards stylish. The palate is full of lively red fruit, with a keen line of tannin attached. Wholesome, with a mark of freshness; very true Gigondas from the top rank. **Drink** 2017-2028 **Alc** 14%



# **Michel Mourier, Les Fétoules 2012** 17.25 (90+) **SF** 16.5 JLL 18 MOW 17

£22 ABS Wine Agencies

Episcopal colour and a nose to match, regal and potent; ripe fruit and plenty of herbs and spices. The palate is lined with salted fresh fruit and lively tannins, plenty of energy in them. Go for it. **Drink** 2017-2031 **Alc** 14.5%



# **Ogier, Oratorio 2013** 17.25 (90+) **SF** 17 JLL 17 **MOW** 17.5

£14 Advini

A nose where saturnine Mourvèdre notes creep in, alongside coffee, liquorice and eucalypt. The palate is generous and open with a savoury flavour of prunes. Full and long, with plenty of matter to appeal; authentic.

Drink 2016-2026 Alc 14%



# **Domaine Carobelle 2013** 17 (90) SF 16.5 JLL 17.5 MOW 17

£20 Majestic

Pine and basil in big heaps on the early nose, with a note of hung meat; Syrah. Palate has herbal elegance with bustling tannins. It finishes rich and lovely, with no-holds-barred honesty. **Drink** 2017-2031 **Alc** 14%



## Domaine La Bouïssière, La Font de Tonin 2012 17 (90)

**SF** 17.5 **JLL** 17.25 **MOW** 16.5

£30.50-£32.95 Lea & Sandeman, Montrachet Blackberry and a crème brûlée, burnt sugar aroma, with a strong show of dark fruit and mint. The palate marries spice and fruit, with a very tannic backdrop underlining its intent. The finish is all about tar, and assertion.

Drink 2016-2031 Alc 15%



# **Domaine La Fourmone, Le Fauquet 2013** 17 (90) SF 17.5 JLL 17.75 MOW 16

£17.90 (2011) The French Wine Project Interesting nose of cassis and hints of fennel and mint; memories of the herb market at Arles. The palate bears a generous fruit, with a coating that pleases; traditional in character, but does not lack personality or potential.

Drink 2016-2029 Alc 14.5%



# **E Guigal 2011** 17 (90) **SF** 17.5 JLL 16.75 **MOW** 16.5

£23-£25 Clifton Cellars, Fenwicks, Fells, Portland

Big-boned and muscular, yet showing plenty of cassis and violet fruit behind, this is a demonstrative and eloquent wine. The palate is savoury, holding good body and tannins that are beginning to become supple and rounded. **Drink** 2016-2026 **Alc** 14.5% >>



# Highly Recommended 17-18.25pts (90-94pts)



# **Famille Perrin, La Gille 2013** 17 (90) SF 16 JLL 18 MOW 17

£19.99-£21.95 Berry Bros & Rudd, Virgin Wines, WoodWinters

Pine and basil, essence of cassis fruit on the nose, a solid depth and breadth in the bouquet. A full-bodied style with well-fitted tannins that add bulk to the finish. Proper, good Gigondas for game dishes, beef stews. **Drink** 2017-2028 **Alc** 13.5%



# **Jérôme Busato, Cor Hominis Laetificat 2010** 17 (90)

**SF** 16 **JLL** 17 **MOW** 18

N/A UK +33 (0)4 90 41 81 90

Lucid black and blue berry fruit on first sniff, along with liquorice and oak. This is a firm, polished and powerful Gigondas that displays a good heart and depth. Time will help to make this brilliant. **Drink** 2016-2029 **Alc** 14%



## **Vidal-Fleury 2012** 17 (90)

**SF** 16.5 **JLL** 16.5 **MOW** 18

The nose has a brewed nature, comes with a prune air about it, and a little date-style ripeness. The palate brings together juicy fruit with a rounded set of tannins, and is modern and effective. A rich, full-throttle Rhône.

Drink 2017-2028 Alc 14%

## Recommended 15-16.75pts (83-89pts)

Wine	Score	SF	JLL	MOW	Tasting note	Alc	Drink	Price	Stockists
Arnoux & Fils, Seigneur de Lauris 2011	16.75 (89)	16	17	17.5	Modern style, with creamy ripe fruit, persuasively elegant tannins and nicely balanced acidity. Collects itself well on the finish and has lovely fruit.	15%	2016- 2027	£18 (2009)	Soho Wine Co
Domaine de La Tourade, Font des Aïeux 2013	16.75 (89)	16	16.75	17.5	Cooked plums with a dash of flowers; very Grenache-led. Palate has a cosy ball of spiced dark berry flavour with a tobacco element on the finish.	14%	2017- 2029	N/A UK	www.domainedelatourade.com
Domaine Les Semelles de Vent 2013	16.75 (89)	16.5	16.75	17	Aromatics of violet, cassis and garrigue. The palate serves clear, bright fruit with a density and darkness that emerge later.	14%	2017- 2021	N/A UK	+33 (0)6 75 74 62 34
Domaine St-Damien, La Louisiane 2011	16.75 (89)	17	16.5	16.5	Spiced nose with cooked strawberry jam. The palate has flavour of black raisin, date and prune seasoning; bright and demonstrative.	15%	2016- 2025	£22	Anglia Wines, Askew Wines, Corking Wines, Hallgarten Druitt & Novum
Maison Bouachon, Duc de Montfort 2013	16.75 (89)	17.5	16.75	16	Smoky bacon, blackberry aroma, and cassis bud aromas. Interesting palate combining spice, mint, fennel and dark fruit; the Syrah lends lift and elegance.	13.5%	2016- 2027	N/A UK	www.maisonbouachon.com
Serabel 2013	16.75 (89)	16.5	17	17	Smoked, cassis aroma, with reserves of ripeness. Palate is faithfully Grenache with a swish of berry fruit that extends pleasingly. Bonny wine.	13.5%	2017- 2024	£16	Oddbins
Caves St-Pierre 2013	16.5 (88)	15.5	16.75	17.5	Honest, expressive wine with blackberry and mint on the nose. Has good flow of juicy fruit, with a light tannic dusting; fairly complete.	13.5%	2017- 2028	N/A UK	www.cavessaintpierre.fr
Dauvergne Ranvier, Vin Rare 2013	16.5 (88)	16	17.25	16.5	Briary, garrigue, and an inset of raspberry fruit. The palate is crisp, with woven tannins alongside its direct red fruit. Good local expression.	15%	2016- 2029	£20-£25	Matthew Clark, Wine Story
Domaine la Haute Marone, Le Cru des Dentelles de Montmirail 2012	16.5 (88)	16.5	16.75	16.5	Has a brewed, prune fruit aroma with some sunny, ripe depth, leading to a palate of damson, cassis and forest fruits. Long and refreshing on the finish.	14.5%	2017- 2028	£14.50- £14.75	Best Cellars, Camber Wines, D Byrne & Co, Drinkmonger, John Hattersley, Welch & Co
Domaine la Soumade 2013	16.5 (88)	15.5	16.75	17	Lifted floral style, violets and hints of laurel and cassis. Dark, more traditional than modern. Gummy tannins line the palate; for autumn or winter drinking.	14.5%	2017- 2030	£22.50	Thorman Hunt
Domaine Les Goubert 2012	16.5 (88)	16	15.75	17.5	Spice and cloves feature on the nose, red stone fruit, and a heart of Grenache. The palate has a breadth of flavour with slightly dusty tannins.	13.5%	2017- 2026	£17.95	The Wine Tasting Shop, Truffles Deli
Domaine Notre Dame des Pallières, Les Mourres 2013	16.5 (88)	16.5	16.75	16	Modern, rather sophisticated nose; red and black fruit fight it out on a bed of spice. The palate has a swirl of plum-style, smoky fruit and a sound depth.	14%	2016- 2024	£15	Bibendum, Cru World Wine, Majestic
Montirius, Confidentiel 2013	16.5 (88)	16	16.5	17	Attractive, savoury nose. The palate has a plump heart and a soft line of tannin with a pleasing peppery finish. Bright with some fat and length.	14%	2017- 2024	£27.95- £29.95	Berry Bros & Rudd, OW Loeb
Domaine de Cabasse 2012	16.25 (87)	16	15.5	17	Honest, approachable Grenache with aromatics of blueberry and myrtle. The palate is restrained, some Grenache red fruit and spice apparent as it ends.	14%	2016- 2028	£27.90	La Cave de Bruno
Domaine du Grapillon d'Or, Excellence 2012	16.25 (87)	15.5	16.25	17	Notes of damp soil, prune and a liquorice and baked bread angle. Syrah lends floral elegance and a persistence in counterpoint to the balanced acidity.	14.5%	2017- 2022	£24.50-	Hedonism, Montrachet, Slurp
Domaine des Bosquets 2013	16.25 (87)	16	16.5	16	Simmered berry and coffee bean aromas. The palate bears some bright fruit with a keen set of tannins. Some warmth on the finish, needs time.	15%	2017- 2028	£25.99	Eton Vintners, Liberty Wines, Hay Wines, The Secret Cellar, Winedirect
Domaine des Florets, Les Florets 2013	16.25 (87)	16.5	16.5	16	Attractive nose of ripe red fruit with soft spice in support. The palate bears clear fruit and smooth tannins, works in harmony making for a tidy finish.	14.5%	2016- 2027	£14.50	Christopher Keiller
Domaine des Pasquiers 2013	16.25 (87)	16	17	15.5	Pine trees, black berry intensity on the nose, has an engaging clarity and lift. The palate has violets and an almost northern charm; still making its way.	14%	2017- 2027	£25	Dulwich Vintners, La Marchande
Domaine du Pesquier 2013	16.25 (87)	17	16.5	15.5	Full-bodied and beguilingly aromatic; tar and roses, and hints of the kitchen garden. The palate holds tasty berry fruit, smooth tannins, mostly in step.	14.5%	2016- 2027	£17	OW Loeb
Domaine du Terme 2012	16.25	15.5	17.5	16	Inky, spiced plum aroma, with a drift of pot-pourri, and a note of mineral. The palate expresses a stylish version of Gigondas and a flamboyant personality.	14.5%	2016- 2029	£17	Theatre of Wine

# Recommended (continued) 15-16.75pts (83-89pts)

Wine	Score	SF	JLL	MOW	Tasting note	Alc	Drink	Price	Stockists
Domaine La Bouïssière 2013	16.25 (87)	15	17	16.5	A smart nose, sartorially impressive. Palate rolls with a constant spicing and picks up crisp tannin as it goes. Genuine Gigondas, a nice darkness about it.	14.5%	2017- 2028	£18-£20	Bowes Wine, Fine & Rare, Gauntleys, Lay & Wheeler
Domaine Raspail-Ay 2013	16.25 (87)	15.5	17	16.5	Pine-basil duo on the early nose – it comes with a meat stock and cassis intensity. There is structure here, and some fine flavours.	14%	2017- 2030	£28	Vin Cognito, Vinetrail
Domaine St-Gayan, Origine 2012	16.25 (87)	16	15.5	17	Classic Gigondas; excellent dark fruit character battling bravely with slightly rustic, old wood tannins. It has the freedom of 2012, and may gain in depth.	14%	2017- 2027	£16.95	Yapp Bros
Gabriel Meffre, Laurus 2012	16.25 (87)	15	17.25	16.5	Creamy, ripe strawberry nose with polished oak and ripe Morello cherry. The palate is lined with juicy, clear-cut black fruit and a dash of lively tannin.	14.5%	2017- 2031	£19	Guy Anderson
Gabriel Meffre, Ste-Catherine 2012	16.25 (87)	16	16.25	16.5	Approachable nose of Parma violet and liqueur de cassis. The palate bears engaging stone fruit and a solid line of tannin giving definition to the finish.	14%	2016- 2026	N/A UK	www.gabriel-meffre.fr
Les Pallières, Les Racines 2013	16.25 (87)	16	15.75	17	Big-boned, slightly clumsy style; old school with fig aromas and a spiced palate. The fruit supports the tannins and finishes on cocoa.	14.5%	2017- 2026	£23.50- £29.95	Berry Bros & Rudd, Private Cellar, Tanners
L'Hallali, Grande Réserve 2012	16.25 (87)	16.5	15.75	16.5	Garrigue and forest floor adorn nicely. The palate is spiced and quietly dense. Suited to country foods, stews, and pies. Traditional and local in style.	14.5%	2017-	£18	Borough Wines
Arnoux & Fils, Vieux Clocher 2013	16 (86)	16	15.75	16	Lively and energetic in aroma and colour, confirmed by the palate, which has a savoury elegance and plenty of energetic vivacity.	14.5%	2017- 2027	£18.67	Jascots
Bonpas, Sieur Alphonse 2012	16 (86)	15	16	17	Blueberry fruit with a sunny ripeness on the nose, and a note of fruit cake.  The palate is compact, perhaps needing 18 months to properly fuse.	13.5%	2017-	N/A UK	www.boissetcollection.com
Brotte, La Marasque 2013	16 (86)	15.5	16	16.5	Cautious nose with a leafy side to it, with red berries present. The palate is vibrant and edgy, and has a nice touch of Provençal herbs.	14%	2016- 2028	£20	Inverarity Morton
Brunel Père et Fils, Brunel de la Gardine 2013	16 (86)	15.5	16.75	16	Restrained black and blue berry fruit aroma, hint of sizzled bacon. The palate is tight, with a line of fruit and juice just starting to show through.	13.5%	2016- 2027	£25	Gerrard Seel
Domaine des Bosquets, La Colline 2013	16 (86)	15.5	16.75	16	Smoky bacon with an inlay of black berry fruit. Palate has spice and red fruit; the finish is a little diffuse, but with balanced acidity lending elegant support.	15%	2017- 2029	N/A UK	www.famillebrechet.com
Château du Trignon 2010	15.75 (85+)	14.5	16.5	16	The big bad boy hits town – the nose is a beefcake. The palate bears a swell run of dark fruit and ends with good freshness.	14%	2016- 2030	£18.75-	All About Wine, Berkmann, Oakham Wines
Château de St Cosme, Le Claux 2012	15.75 (85+)	16	16.5	15	Bouquet led by prune fruit, with a red meat presence. Finely poised with elegant acidity and tannins etched in the softest, most accommodating stone.	14.5%	2017-	£50-£56	Bordeaux Index, Fine & Rare, The Fine Wine Co
Dauvergne Ranvier, Grand Vin 2013	15.75 (85+)	14	16.75	16.5	Stewed raspberry, mulberry fruit aroma is pleasing, has bonny warmth. An inlay of crunchy dark fruit, with tannins hovering on the outside as it finishes.	14.5%	2017-	£15.50 (2011)	Your Sommelier
Domaine Brusset, Tradition Le Grand Montmirail 2014	15.75 (85+)	15.5	15.5	16	A nose of violets and hints of strawberry. The non-Grenache elements bring a darkness that is for now tarry, but the fruit is cleanly struck.	13.5%	2017-	£15	Enotria
Domaine du Grand Montmirail, Cuvée Vieilles Vignes 2013	15.75 (85+)	15	16	16	The nose is a bit streaky, with a direct run of fruit, latent black pepper. The palate is fresh, and that marks its crisp texture.	14.5%	2016- 2028	£17.75-	Peter Osborne, Yapp Bros
Domaine La Fourmone, Le Secret 2011	15.75 (85+)	15.5	15.75	16	Broad texture, herbal attack, blue fruit character; regal and relatively restrained, nicely balanced with great fruit.	14.5%	2016- 2024	N/A UK	www.domaine-la-fourmone.com
Domaine St-Damien, Vieilles Vignes 2013	15.75 (85+)	15	16.25	16	An honest old-style wine; plenty of alcohol and Grenache bravura; tannic and stentorian, but may well outlive its peers.	14.5%	2016- 2026	£20.66	Eton Vintners, Hallgarten Druitt & Novum
Lavaux 2013	15.75 (85+)	14.5	16.5	16.5	Modern, attractive style. Palate centred on stone fruits with a menthol insert near the finish. Decanting will help to free the 50% non-Grenache grapes.	14.5%	2016-	£19	Boutinot
Le Clos des Cazaux, Prestige 2012	15.75 (85+)	15.5	15.25	16.5	The nose is seared, almost burnt, with a dart of acidity in its fruit. Traditional, and would be fine with sanglier. Needs a few years as it's a touch uptight.	14.5%	2017-	N/A UK	www.closdescazaux.fr
Olivier Ravoire 2014	15.75 (85+)	16	15	16.5	A nose of balsam and mulberry; an attractive, forward style. The palate rolls along, taking on some light, crunchy tannin. Good grip with some warmth.	14%	2016-	N/A UK	www.olivier-ravoire.com
Pascal 2011	15.75 (85+)	16	15	16	An impressive blend of flavours and synesthetic impressions. The palate is coated with spiced, dark fruit and lengthens on a stern set of tannins.	14.5%	2016- 2025	£15.95	Yapp Bros
Tardieu-Laurent, Vieilles Vignes 2014	15.75 (85+)	16	16	15	Slightly smoky blackberry aroma, gives a calm start. Palate has energy, grip and an attractive blue fruit character. Will develop in an engaging fashion.	14.5%	2016-	£21.75	Corney & Barrow, Vin Cognito
Cellier des Princes 2012	15.5 (85)	15	15.5	16	Intense, quite tarry nose of liquorice and spice. The palate presents an easy line of spiced red fruit, with a tuck-in of cosy tannin.	14.5%	2016-	£15	Free Run Wines
Domaine d'Ouréa 2013	15.5 (85)	15.5	15.75	15	Autumnal aromas with layers of blackberries. The palate bears streamlined fruit with a jolly juiciness, and is spiced late-on with firm acidity.	14.5%	2016-	£29.95 (2012)	Berry Bros & Rudd
Domaine Santa Duc, Aux Lieux-Dits 2012	15.5 (85)	14	16	16.5	Blackberry with a liqueur note about it on the nose. The palate bears well textured fruit with a gain in tar and black olive elements towards the finish.	14.5%	2016-	£21.75-	Berry Bros & Rudd, H2Vin
Grandes Serres, La Combe des Marchands 2014	15.5 (85)	16.5	14	16	Nose of tobacco, loganberry and cassis, dignified even in precocity. The palate offers a brief flash of dark fruit, but is limited in scale and scope.	15%	2016-	POA	Amathus
Domaine du Grapillon d'Or, 1806 2014	15.25 (84)	14	15.5	16	A come-hither nose of wild strawberry and hints of fig. The palate offers savoury black fruit and a little warmth of tannin.	14.5%	2016-	£19.99	Montrachet, SH Jones, Slurp, Vine Trail, Waitrose

# Decanter PANEL TASTING

## Recommended (continued) 15-16.75pts (83-89pts)

Wine	Score	SF	JLL	MOW	Tasting note	Alc	Drink	Price	Stockists
Les Pallières, Terrasse du Diable 2013	15.25 (84)	14	15.5	16	Mint and herbs with a suggestion of roast lamb aroma, and plum fruit present.  The palate is compact, though lacks real extension.	14.5%	2016- 2026	£19.50- £21.67	Hedonism, Millésima, Uncorked,
M Chapoutier 2014	15.25 (84)	15.5	14	16	The nose is sultry, has a high element, pork scratching. Palate has potential with the acid-fruit axis nicely poised.	14%	2016- 2021	£23	Frazier, ND John
Ogier, Duc de Mayreuil 2014	15.25 (84)	15	15.75	15	Blackberry with a light note of baking. Palate has hints of almond and laurel behind the fruit, making for an engaging interplay between sweet and spice.	14.5%	2016- 2022	N/A UK	www.ogier.fr
Château Raspail 2013	15 (83)	14.5	16.25	14	Peppery, meat stock aroma, with enough depth to evolve over time. The palate runs with crisp, dark fruit, capturing local freshness.	14%	2017- 2025	£16.50	From Vineyards Direct, The Wine Society
Château de St-Cosme, Hominis Fides 2012	15 (83)	13	16.25	15.5	Brewed density on the nose – with a sweet note, a red berry presence. The palate is a big ticket operator, with an abundance of tannin stamping.	14.5%	2017- 2029	£48-£53	Cru World Wine, Decorum, Handford, Paramount
Delas, Les Reinages 2013	15 (83)	14.5	16.25	14	Calm, rounded red berry aroma; has a little style. The palate provides fresh fruit, a true Gigondas cut, and extends quietly.	14%	2016- 2023	N/A UK	www.delas.com
Domaine Brusset, Les Hauts de Montmirail 2014	15 (83)	14	15.25	16	Youthful, with red fruits in the ascendency, then hints of garrigue and soft spice. The palate presents clear, rolling fruit in the accessible 2014 manner.	14%	2016- 2022	£22.80	Enotria
Domaine du Pourra, La Réserve 2012	15 (83)	14.5	15.5	15	The nose is assertive, close to high tone, with spiced black fruit and pine needles. The palate is relatively austere and finishes short.	15%	2016- 2026	£19 (2010)	The Wine Society
La Bastide St-Vincent 2014	15 (83)	15	14.75	15	Attractive nose of myrtle and hints of briar. The palate is savoury, with a pleasant flow of red berry fruit, and some mild tannin.	14.5%	2016- 2020	£18.45 (2013)	Berry Bros & Rudd
La Compagnie Rhodanienne, Clos du Bois de Menge 2014	15 (83)	16	13.75	15	A precocious nose; red fruits to the fore, with soft spice behind and also hints of thyme. The palate lacks quality in its fruit, and seems tired.	15%	2016- 2020	N/A UK	www.compagnierhodanienne.fr
Le Clos des Cazaux, La Tour Sarrasine 2013	15 (83)	14.5	15	15.5	Earthy notes on the nose, followed by a palate that bears red berry fruit with a brewed nature. Lacks a bit of depth.	14.5%	2016- 2021	£14- £15.60	Private Cellar, Tanners, The Wine Society

Fair 13-14.75pts (76-82pts)

■ Domaine de La Tourade 2013 14.75 (82) ■ La Compagnie Rhodanienne, Les Sources de Montmirail 2014 14.75 (82) ■ La Ferme du Mont, Jugunda 2014 14.75 (82) Pierre-Henri Morel 2014 14.75 (82)

■ Domaine du Gour de Chaulé, Cuvée Tradition 2014 14.5 (81) ■ Montirius, Terre des Aînés 2013 14 (80)

Poor 11-12.75pts (70-75+pts)

■ Louis Bernard, Les Cabassières 2013 12.75 (75+)

For full UK stockist details, see p116

# My top three

## Simon Field MW

#### ■ Domaine de Coyeux 2012

An accomplished piece of work. Richly traditional, with a vestigial rawness tempered by the sheer quality of the fruit, along with a sweetly savoury finish deliciously contradictory, just delicious in fact. A great match for a plate of game. 18.5/20 (95/100) Drink 2017-2030

■ Pierre Amadieu. Domaine Grand Romane 2013 At above 400 metres elevation, this is a northeast facing exemplar of poor soils, old vines and fantastic wine. The juxtaposition of sweetness and spice impressed, as did the integration of Mourvèdre and the wooden barrels, both done with subtlety and panache. 18.5 (95) Drink 2017-2030

■ Domaine La Bouïssière, La Font de **Tonin 2012** Uncompromisingly powerful yet fresh. Great wine from a cool pocket of the appellation. Dignified, dense, yet not heavy - quintessential Gigondas, in other words... 17.5 (91) Drink 2016-2031

# My top three

## John Livingstone-Learmonth

■ Pierre Amadieu, Domaine Grand Romane 2013 Top-grade wine can whistle an image straight into your glass. Here it is one of an autumn walk in the isolated vineyards of this high-up estate, surrounded by garrigue brush and olive trees. Genuinely deep, very lively, a grand do. 18.75/20 (95+/100) Drink 2017-2030

■ Domaine de Coyeux 2012 From a small plot high up in the Dentelles, and representing the renaissance of an estate after a change of ownership. Based on 1950s and 1960s Grenache, this is bright and stylish, and carries local density on the finish. 18.5 (95) Drink 2017-2030

■ Famille Perrin, La Gille 2013 The Perrins have been investing in vineyards and various other visitor attractions at Gigondas - they mean business. This is good, big wine with concerted juice at its heart: drink it with stews and game dishes. 18 (93) Drink 2017-2028.

NB: the tasters' top wines are not necessarily their top-scoring, rather those which, on learning the wines' identity, they feel are the most notable given their provenance, price or other factors

# My top three

# Marcel Orford-Williams

■ Domaine de Coyeux 2012 The vineyards of Gigondas, Vacqueyras and Beaumes-de-Venise touch one another at this point. This estate's production of Gigondas is small, but the quality here was excellent, and it is well worth seeking out. **18.5/20 (95/100) Drink** 2017-2030

■ Vidal-Fleury 2012 I was impressed by this wine from a venerable négociant - one who buys parcels and blends together to make a sum that so often is better than the parts - now owned by Guigal. The quality and attention to detail typical of Guigal was obvious in this full-throttle Gigondas. 18 (93) Drink 2017-2028

**■** Domaine Notre Dame des Pallières, Bois des Mourres 2012 An old name in Gigondas, where at least three estates have Pallières in the name. The Roux family are the owners here, in a part of Gigondas full of natural spring water from the Dentelles de Montmirail. This is a Gigondas that will benefit from keeping. 17.5 (91) Drink 2017-2029

# Expert summary: John Livingstone-Learmonth

This region has fast forged its own distinct identity, and has upped its game to become one of the most consistent appellations in France



John Livingstone-Learmonth is the Decanter World Wine Awards Regional Chair for Rhône. He is a key contributor to the book *Gigondas, Its* Wines, Its Land, Its People

GIGONDAS IS AN appellation that has had only four decades – less than half the life of an old Grenache vine – to grow up and show the world its true capabilities. Now, thanks to increased detail in the vineyard – canopy management, soil working, green harvesting – and better care in the cellar, fruit quality is much improved. Setting aside the habitual big players here – Domaines Raspail-Ay, Les Pallières, Pesquier, St-Gayan, Santa Duc, Château de St-Cosme, Pierre Amadieu, to name a few, the benefits now extend across small domaines into the world of the merchants, who don't always have access to the very best crop in a normal vintage.

Hence the general quality bar has been raised, as witnessed by the performance of merchants such as Le Plan des Moines based at St-Rémy de Provence, Ogier at Châteauneuf-du-Pape, and Xavier Mourier and Vidal-Fleury from the northern Rhône. The first-named vinify the wine themselves, taking a further, encouraging step towards mastery of the process from start to finish.

However, an unwelcome trend when I taste Gigondas of about a year old is the growing percentage already bottled: as this tasting showed, they often fail to deliver – be it depth, or real local authenticity. Okay, these will

frequently be sold in large supermarkets, but they don't help the image of the appellation, often being less interesting than many Côtes du Rhône Villages wines.

Just as the merchant wines generally come together earlier than many, so the wines of traditional domaines take their time – evidenced in the stimulating 2013 vintage in this tasting. The 2012s were bang in line with their vintage's easy and open generosity. They are enjoyable, but lack some of the bad boy/bad girl element of the 2013s – they have less character.

While it is still true that many consumers cannot remember the name of the domaine whose wine they have drunk, the tasting showed that Gigondas is a pretty reliable purchase when it is bought without a prime domaine supplier in mind. As such, it outscores more sleepy appellations such as Vinsobres, Beaumes-de-Venise, Lirac and Vacqueyras.

'Gigondas does a good job of supplying fresh wines that often have a true local identity'

# COYEUX

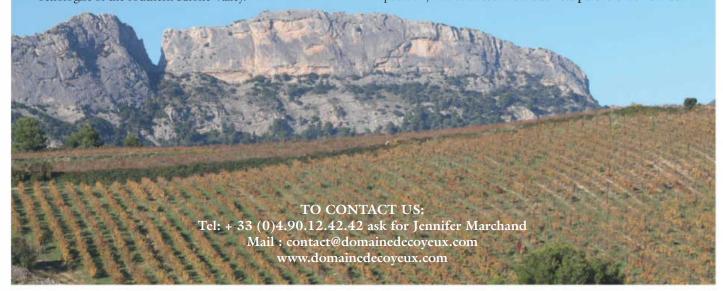
years after its creation, Domaine de Coyeux has been taken over by Hugues de Feraudy. This 112 ha property on "pure Trias soil" perched on the heights of Beaumes de Venise, offers visitors an exceptional panorama, extending from the "Dentelles de Montmirail" to Mont Ventoux and the plain of Vaucluse.

Many investments related to the conversion of vineyards, but also to the renovation of the winemaking equipment are underway, and they are framed by Xavier Vignon, renowned oenologist of the southern Rhône Valley.

Domaine de Coyeux is working its vineyards on the hills, and raises its wines, characterized by their aromatic freshness and finesse, in three appellations "Cru Côtes du Rhône":

- Muscat de Beaumes de Venise, vin doux naturel (sweet white wine)
- Beaumes de Venise, rouge.
- Gigondas, rouge

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# **Champagne Brut Nature & Extra Brut**

Often at their best with food, these driest of dry Champagne styles are adored by some, but can be a challenge to the palate of others, as Michael Edwards explains

THIS ULTRA-DRY CATEGORY of low- or no-dosage Champagne has been fashionable since at least 2000, but its history is, in fact, much older. In the 1890s, the family house of Laurent-Perrier launched a 'sugarless' cuvée of Champagne, which had no added dose of mature wine and cane sugar to soften the acidic edges; but as in all Champagne-making, there was then (as now) a trace, a gram or so, of residual sugar in the wine to complete fermentations. The sea-change to Extra Brut began in the years after 1945, when Madame Lily Bollinger decided to release a limited quantity of 'Réserve 1947', aiming to create some competition for the prestige cuvées such as Dom Pérignon and Comtes de Champagne already present in the American market.

Tante Lily's strategy, innovative yet classical, was to choose an older vintage that was disgorged late, that is as an Extra Brut with less than six grams of sugar per litre. It was a daring move at a time when aged Champagnes weren't fashionable. In 1967, the name was finally settled as RD (recently disgorged) for the launch of this, her first prestige cuvée in the epic 1952, which was followed by a glorious run of RDs in the 1950s and 1960s. These, selectively, were ideally ripe from sunny harvests; they had no need of conventional dosage, which was then around 10g/I or more. The Extra Brut principle continues in the current RD 2002, though Bollinger prefers the simple label Brut, allowed under the appellation.

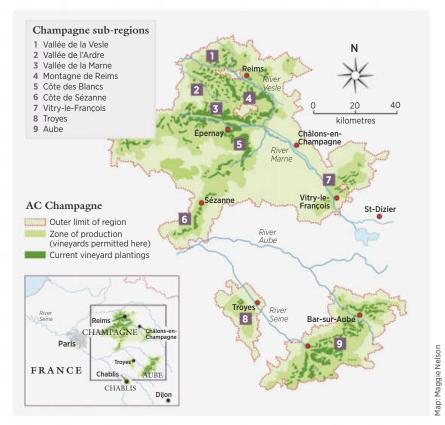
#### **Developing category**

There's the rub, for on the 49th Parallel of Champagne, historically among the most northerly vineyards in France, you couldn't make an Extra Brut in unripe years. Vintage conditions are still crucial, even if the year isn't mentioned on the label. The kind of Champagne lover who would like this pure style is one who treats it as a serious wine. Extra Brut is maybe most comfortable with saline seafood, and Brut Zéro even more so, for those purists who like what the French call la noble amertume - a touch of bitterness, in a positive sense.

The whole category is a niche market. The pervasive Brut shipped to the UK in 2010 at 32.1 million bottles, dwarfing Extra Brut at 303,288 and Nature at 4,770 bottles. Warmer, generally earlier vintages since 1989 have brought much riper grapes: the downside is the chaotic distribution of rainfall in blip years - August downpours in 2010 and 2013, and a lack of consistent ripeness in 2011. For me, Chardonnay works best in the extra-dry style, coping better with climatic extremes than the Pinots. Rosé relies more on slightly higher dosage for 'sweet' fruit. And remember, the right dosage is a protector of a wine's aromatics and longevity.

So, is Brut Nature in particular capable of ageing? It's an open question, as yet unanswered.

Michael Edwards is an author specialising in Champagne



## **Champagne: know your vintages**

2015 is potentially one of the greats. 2014 is a mixed bag, and unlikely to be a vintage for grandes maisons. 2013 was the latest vintage into October for 40 years, best for very dry Chardonnay.

2012 Outstanding Pinot Noir; bold, rather four-square Chardonnays.

2011 Not for the long-haul, and not declared except by top growers.

2010 Chardonnays well-structured, but a bit edgy for Extra Brut.

2009 Some seductive Pinot Noirs.

If it hadn't followed the great 2008, 2009 would have been rated tops.

2008 A truly great vintage, up there with 2002 but in a very different. dry, classical style. One for long cellaring.

 $2006\,$  A forward charmer. Will give pleasure while 2008 and 2002 develop.

2004 Very fine, even vintage, large but effortlessly balanced.

2002 One of the greatest since 1945, above all for Pinot Noir. The best will keep for years.

### Champagne: the facts (source: CIVC, for 2014)

Total productive area 33,705ha Total production including wines in reserve 2,530,811hl or 337,441,488 bottles Number of growers (exploitants) 15,798 Dosage Brut - less than 12 grams/litre

Extra Brut - between Og/I and 6g/I. For a level of less than 3g/l, and if the wine has no addition of sugar (post fermentation), terms such as Brut Nature, pas-dosé, Brut Zéro may be used. >

# The results

It's a fashionable category, but still a niche one, representing a tiny amount of the market, said our tasters. An interesting tasting, said the panel, but no truly exceptional wines. Amy Wislocki reports

SUGAR IS THE new evil,' pronounced Simon Field MW. 'It gives you diabetes, and makes you fat. Hence the current fashion for low-dosage Champagne. The dosage has come down in the Champagne category as a whole over the past 10 or 15 years,' he observed, 'from an average 12 grams/litre of sugar to around 9g/l. But is it correct to go right down to zero, or close to zero?'

'It's totally driven by fashion,' agreed Michael Edwards. People love the idea of something completely dry. Whether they like it in the glass is another matter.' Edwards was relatively impressed by the category: 'I think the wines showed themselves honourably, without any dramatic successes. I don't think we found any gold-standard examples.'

'You'll always be disappointed with this style,' said Field, 'because there is nowhere to hide; you really are exposing everything.' It's risky too, he added. 'When the dosage is zero or almost zero, you have oxidative vulnerability, and need more sulphur at disgorgement.'

This helps to explain why the volumes are so small still. 'You need a very good site and old vines, and it's

# 'The terroiristes performed extremely well in this fascinating tasting' Simon Field MW

generally done on a small scale,' explained Edwards. 'It's a very difficult category to produce, and you can count the people who do it well on one hand. But when it's good, it's very good.'

Xavier Rousset MS expressed a preference for wines with a touch of sugar as opposed to none. 'I prefer Ig or 2g of sugar to none, as a generalisation, and found the Extra Bruts more interesting,' agreed Edwards. 'Sugar is an activator of aromas, and even in the very good Brut Natures, the aromas are fairly subdued.'

All the tasters questioned the long-term ageability of the category, concluding that it's an unknown quantity since the style is so new. 'It's a touchy subject,' said Edwards. 'Some people say the lack of sugar means they won't age as well, and there may be some truth in that.

## The scores

57 wines tasted

Outstanding

Outstanding

Highly recommended

Recommended

6 Fair

| Poor

O Faulty

# The tasters' verdicts

## Michael Edwards



As a freelance writer, Edwards specialises in Champagne and gastronomy. In 2010, he won the Louis Roederer International Wine Book of the Year for The Finest Wines of Champagne, and in 2014 he was the first non-Champenois to be made a Confrère of St-Vincent de Vertus. He blogs on www.michaelbulles.blogspot.co.uk.

#### Edwards' verdict

'This tasting was held on an overcast

morning – mentioned only because low atmospheric pressure can sometimes affect the form of tasters and the wines themselves. Personally I found the tasting quite taxing. Main impression, blind, was how challenging the Brut Nature/Extra Brut wines can be. Most of the Champagnes were non-vintage, most likely based on 2010/2011. Neither year was regularly warm and sunny at harvest – the conditions you really need to tame this austere category. Those based on warm vintages, such as the generous 2006, showed their promise when tasted blind earlier.

'Creditable wines though aplenty, the best were Chardonnay Côte des Blancs. This is a category best handled as a micro-focus by smaller maisons or domaines who favour old vines, great terroirs, late picking. Successful Brut Nature/Extra Brut is hard to make in volume. On the downside, quite a few wines lacked aromas, with an unbalanced shiver factor. My expectations, I hope realistic, were met. It's all about geography and weather – Brut Zéro is much easier south of the Alps.'

## Simon Field MW



Field joined Berry Bros & Rudd in 1998, having spent several years as a chartered accountant in London. He is responsible for purchasing Champagne as well as wines from Languedoc-Roussillon, the Rhône, Germany, England and Sherry. He became a Master of Wine in 2002.

#### Field's verdict

'Champagnes have been cutting down on their sugar over the last decade or so.

This is no bad thing in a world where sugar is the new nicotine and where quality in Champagne is more and more associated with stylistic differences and the need to express a sense of place, rather than achieving a year-on-year consistency. Yet if quality is to be upheld by an older base year and a longer tirage, a little sugar will need to be added, in order to soften the impact of disgorgement and to reduce the need to add too much sulphur. Swings and roundabouts, maybe, but I still came to this tasting with relatively high expectations. The results were not disappointing... I was impressed by the consistency of the inconsistencies, as it were, the skill with which the Brut Nature wines, in general, married inherent austerity with hard-won complexity. The Extra Brut styles have a derogation to go to 6g/I and some were relatively opulent in comparison to their more steely siblings. Overall, however, terroir won through in both styles and it should therefore be no surprise that the naturally inclined 'terroiristes', namely the growers, generally performed extremely well in this fascinating tasting."

# **Champagne Brut Nature & Extra Brut**

My view is that these will be good for five or 10 years, but after that I'm really not sure.'

Focusing on the vintage wines, Edwards felt that the riper vintages lent themselves better to the style, understandably. Field added that vintage wines in general should work better than non-vintage - 'they're older so they should have mellowed more and work better with less sugar'. To an extent, this was the case, he said, but 'the evidence wasn't overwhelming, and I was a bit disappointed.'

In the style as a whole, the lack of sugar should mean that these wines sing of their variety and terroir - was that the case? Field felt that on the whole they did, though oak got in the way sometimes, particularly in the Extra Brut category. 'I think it's a case of trying to soften the edges with the sweetness of oak,' commented Rousset, who felt the varietal character shone through more brightly than any sense of terroir.

As a style, Rousset continued, the Pinot Noirs are often more food friendly than the Chardonnays, but people need to be prepared for the acidity, which can be off-putting especially when it is drunk as an aperitif. 'It's a big shift, when you're used to Champagne with a 12g/I dosage, to go to 2g/I.'

**Entry criteria:** producers and UK agents were invited to submit samples of white or rosé champagne in Brut Nature or Extra Brut style as stated on the label

# **Highly Recommended**

17-18.25pts (90-94pts)



#### André Jacquart, Mesnil Experience Blanc de Blancs Grand Cru. **Brut Nature NV**

Decanter average score: 17.5/20pts (91/100pts)

Individual judges' scores: Michael Edwards 17.5 Simon Field MW 18 Xavier Rousset MS 17

£52 Huntsworth Wine, Top Selection

Slightly evolved nose with hints of praline and hazelnut, but also displaying fresh citrus, chalk and mineral nuances. Mouthfilling palate with a creamy texture, elegant fizz and fresh acidity. Very much in balance with some exotic notes to finish. Drink 2016-2018 Alcohol 12.5%



#### De Venoge, Louis XV Rosé, Extra Brut 2002 17.25 (90+) ME 17 SF 16.5 XR 18

£160 Zonin UK

Shimmering salmon colour with a vinous nose of rosehip syrup, mushroom, black pepper and strawberries. The palate wears its age well and has a savoury flourish and great structure. Quite profound. Drink 2016-2022 Alc 12% >>

## Xavier Rousset MS



Head sommelier at Le Manoir aux Quat'Saisons from 2004, Rousset and head chef Agnar Sverrisson launched Texture restaurant in London in 2007, winning a Michelin star in 2010. Their second venture, 28°-50° Wine Workshop and Kitchen, was launched in London in 2010. Rousset is currently working on new projects for 2016.

#### Rousset's verdict

'Extra Brut is one of my favourite categories. A little bit of sugar, 3g/I to 6g/I, suits me fine. It softens the edges, making that steely acidity that Champagne is known for more enjoyable and balanced. I often compare it to water in whisky, in the sense that it helps release flavours and increase the pleasure of drinking.

'Lots of work has been done to make Brut Nature less aggressive and more elegant: using more reserve wines, oak, longer ageing on lees, base wine from hotter vintage... But I'm yet to be convinced on a larger scale, and also not sure of its ability to age well. I'm all for "less is more" when it comes to sugar (and sulphur) but not at the expense of drinkability and balance.

'In this tasting, Chardonnay-based Brut Nature did better than Pinot. But for all grape varieties, and in more than one instance, the use of oak was clumsy. Overall, I was disappointed by both categories, often finding mean Chardonnay and austere Pinot not giving much, on nose or palate. I wonder if time will make them more enjoyable...'



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6pm-8pm Consumer Tasting Tickets £25 per person Register or book tickets today

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# Highly Recommended (continued) 17-18.25pts (90-94pts)



## Gosset, Celebris, Extra Brut 2002

17.25 (90+) **ME** 17.5 **SF** 16.5 **XR** 17.5

£110-£140 Berry Bros & Rudd, Bordeaux Index, Champagne Direct, Drinkmonger, Great Grog, Harvey Nichols, Hedonism, Huntsworth Wine, Justerini & Brooks, Selfridges, The Haslemere Cellar, Weavers An impressive, evolved nose with hints of mushroom and bonfire. Elegant, with plenty of life but showing tertiary characters, such as truffle, yet balanced by a crisp acidity; it lingers delicately. Drink 2016-2022 Alc 12%



### Louis Barthélémy, Zéro Dosage Topaze, NV 17.25 (90+) ME 17 SF 17 XR 18

£32.63 Cockburn & Campbell

Fruit dominated by nectarine, mango and praline with some biscuit and spice and showing a bit of age. This is full and rounded with real complexity, poise, and harmony. Alongside food this will fully express itself. **Drink** 2016-2018 **Alc** 12.5%



#### Veuve Fourny & Fils, Cuvée R Premier Cru, Extra Brut NV 17 (90)

ME 17.5 SF 17 XR 16.5

£38-£40 st Andrews Wine Co, Vin Cognito
Expressive, citrussy, fresh and clean with
Mirabelle, greengage and bergamot. On the
palate there is plenty of flesh, with a silky
chocolate character. Maturing gracefully with
great complexity, and perfect as an aperitif.
Drink 2016-2029 Alc 12%

## Recommended 15-16.75pts (83-89pts)

Wine	Score	ME	SF	XR	Tasting note	Alc	Drink	Price	Stockists
Chartogne-Taillet, Ste-Anne, Extra Brut NV	16.75 (89)	17	17.5	16	Stylish nose with citric inclinations, then a palate where the Pinot takes the lead and lends a red fruit character. A bit edgy and youthful, but poised.	12%	2017- 2020	£24- £27.99	Selfridges, The Wine Society, Vine Trail
Egly-Ouriet, Grand Cru VP, Extra Brut NV	16.75 (89)	17.5	16	17	Mature style with a nose of peat and incense framed with minerals. Palate is more grounded, firmly constructed and complex with honey and marmalade.	12.5%	2017- 2022	£52.95	Lea & Sandeman
Larmandier-Bernier, Vieille Vignes de Cramant Grand Cru, Extra Brut 2006	16.75 (89)	17	17	16	Persistent bubbles then a nose of lemongrass, nectarine and vanillin. The palate builds on this last theme with creamy richness and hints of hazelnut.	12.5%	2017- 2020	£56-£65	Berry Bros & Rudd, H2Vin, Lea & Sandeman, WoodWinters
Veuve Fourny & Fils, Blanc de Blancs Premier Cru, Brut Nature NV	16.75 (89)	16	16.5	17.5	Restrained nose with a bready and nutty palate that is fine and elegant.  Shows a bit of age for a reductive style and has great finesse.	12%	2016- 2020	£27-£30	St Andrews Wine Co, The Solent Cellar, Vin Cognito
Veuve Fourny & Fils, Cuvée du Clos Notre Dame 1er Cru, Extra Brut 2006	16.75 (89)	17	16.5	16.5	Aromatics of nougat, strawberry and marzipan with a fresh attack and rapier acidity with hints of mango and nectarine to round it out.	12%	2017- 2020	£85	The Solent Cellar, Vin Cognito
AR Lenoble, Dosage Zéro, Brut Nature NV	16.5 (88)	16.5	16.5	16.5	Quince with orchard fruits; hedonistic. Palate has Brut Nature discipline: wet stones and iodine evidenced, but concentration and elegance on the finish.	12%	2016- 2018	£22.50- £31.95	Ellis Wines, Flint Wines, Stannary St Wine Co
De Sousa, Cuvée des Caudalies Blanc de Blancs, Extra Brut NV	16.5 (88)	16.5	16.5	16.5	Broad and quite exuberant, with tropical fruit. Palate is accomplished and has depth; the oaky mantle will release its grip and the inherent fruit will shine.	12.5%	2016- 2018	£56	Berry Bros & Rudd
Edouard Brun, Grand Cru, Brut Nature NV	16.5 (88)	16	17	16.5	Nose of apricot, nectarine and spring flowers. On the palate, the austerity of the genre is matched elegantly by hints of verbena, ginger and soft spice.	12%	2016- 2018	£88	The Wine Treasury
Louis Brochet, Premier Cru, Extra Brut NV	16.5 (88)	16.5	16.5	16.5	Forward, lactic charm, big bubbles and a rich, somewhat indulgent charm.  Lemony and floral with crisp acidity, where coconut and green fruit marry.	12%	2016- 2020	£28.99	Handford
Pol Roger, Pure, Extra Brut NV	16.5 (88)	17	17	15.5	Straw lemon colour then a nose of summer pudding and sour honey. The palate marries white chocolate, generous green fruit and a hint of spice.	12.5%	2016- 2019	£42-£48	Berry Bros & Rudd, Drinkmonger, The Finest Bubble, Waitrose, Waitrose Cellar, WoodWinters
Ayala, Brut Nature NV	16.25 (87)	16.5	16	16.5	Very correct nose of quince, slate and the kitchen garden. The palate is light-framed, mineral and honest, showing some depth. Needs food.	12%	2016- 2018	£24.50- £25.50	Drinkmonger, Eton Vintners, Slurp, The Champagne Co
Chartogne-Taillet, Couarres Château, Extra Brut 2010	16.25 (87)	16	16.5	16	Deep Pinot Noir colour and red fruit attack; nose of redcurrant and summer flowers. Well-made, needs time to age and soften the acidity.	12%	2017- 2022	£42	Vine Trail
Chartogne-Taillet, Orizeaux, Extra Brut 2010	16.25 (87)	16	15.5	17.5	Suitably forward Pinot Noir nose, hints of earth and terroir behind the fruit. Firm structure showing skilful winemaking and underlying power.	12%	2017- 2020	£46.50	Vine Trail
Claude Cazals, Cuvée Vive, Extra Brut NV	16.25 (87)	16.5	16.5	16	Fresh and round with mature aromas, citrus and peach. Palate is forward and approachable, with hints of exotic fruit in support of the chalky elegance.	12.5%	2016- 2018	£27.95- £34.99	Martinez Wines, Ministry of Drinks
Devaux, Ultra D, Extra Brut NV	16.25 (87)	17	16.5	15	A promising nose with citric fruit and savoury hints. Lush texture, but not overdone; chalky substructure and balanced acidity, and a firm mineral finish.	12%	2016- 2020	£45.99	The Fine Wine Co, Gwin Llyn Wines, Liberty Wines, Planet of the Grapes, Valhalla's Goat
Geoffroy, Pureté, Brut Nature NV	16.25 (87)	17	15.5	16.5	Attractive nose of spice and brioche; very Pinot Meunier on the palate too, with forward red fruit, then white peach and cinnamon on the finish.	12.5%	2016- 2022	£32	Berry Bros & Rudd
Jacquesson, Cuvée 738, Extra Brut NV	16.25 (87)	16.5	17	15.5	A strident, chalky nose, with hints of oatmeal and honeycomb. Steely, firm palate and plenty of explosive potential that presages lengthy development.	12%	2016- 2018	£42-£46	Berry Bros & Rudd, Carruthers & Kent, Highbury Vintners, Stone Vine & Sun, Theatre of Wine
Louis Roederer, Philippe Starck, Brut Nature 2006	16.25 (87)	17	17	15	Impressive nose of yellow fruit, with hints of honey and white chocolate. The palate successfully recaptures all this and adds a distinct red fruit personality.	12%	2016- 2017	£70- £79.95	Berry Bros & Rudd, Harrods, Harvey Nichols, Hedonism, Selfridges, The Finest Bubble
Bruno Paillard, Blanc de Blancs Grand Cru, Extra Brut NV	16 (86)	15.5	15	17.5	Biscuit, yeast, floral and acacia notes. Youthful Chardonnay austerity currently holding sway and needs a little time to open up, but very pleasant.	12%	2016- 2018	£60	Planet of the Grapes, Quintessentially, Selfridges, Wholefoods

# **Champagne Brut Nature & Extra Brut**

# Recommended (continued) 15-16.75pts (83-89pts)

Wine	Score	ME	SF	XR	Tasting note	Alc	Drink	Price	Stockists
Chartogne-Taillet, Lettre de mon Meunier, Extra Brut 2010	16 (86)	15.5	16	16.5	Oaked and polished style with a nose of tobacco and verbena. Food-friendly with crisp acidity and a mature balance. Might need more time to integrate.	12%	2017- 2020	£42	Vine Trail
Billecart-Salmon, Extra Brut 2006	15.75 (85+)	16.5	16	15	Tropical fruits, ripe pear and honey with a touch of hay. The palate has resonance and length, balancing acidity holding it together well.	12%	2016- 2018	£62-£67	Carruthers & Kent, Harvey Nichols, James Nicholson, The Good Wine Shop, Uncorked
Bruno Paillard, Première Cuvée, Extra Brut NV	15.75 (85+)	16	16	15.5	Hedgerow and gentle summer fruits. The palate marries citrus with red fruits, and has hints of vanilla, Mirabelle plum and fig. Harmony.	12%	2016- 2022	£40-£45	Selfridges, Slurp, Spirited Wines
De Sousa, Cuvée 3A, Extra Brut NV	15.75 (85+)	16	15	16.5	Nose of fig and sousbois behind the green fruit charm. Lovely round texture, gentle fizz, floral and honey notes, very pleasant to drink now.	12.5%	2016- 2020	£30	Millésima, Wine Source
De Sousa, Umami Grand Cru, Extra Brut 2009	15.75 (85+)	16.5	15.5	15	Small, persistent bubbles and a satisfying nose which marries stone fruit and autolytic complexity. Elegant mid-palate with concentration and firm acidity.	12.5%	2017- 2020	£100	Millésima
Fleury, Sonate No9 Opus 10, Extra Brut NV	15.75 (85+)	16	16	15	An indulgent and slightly evolved style; nearly oxidised but still holding. Quite an approachable Pinot character, with a finish recalling vanilla and hazelnut.	12.5%	2016- 2020	£68	Sustainable Wines UK, Vintage Roots
Jacques Chaput, Le Mythic, Brut Nature NV	15.75 (85+)	16.5	15.5	15	Spanish gold colour, a nose of orchard fruit and sourdough. Dynamic in the mouth, elegant acidity, tension, excellent middle palate and great length.	12%	2016- 2018	£45	La Marchande
Vincent Couche, Dosage Zéro NV	15.75 (85+)	16.5	15.5	15.5	A very Pinot nose of red berries and hints of white pepper. Big and bold with a savoury palate and hints of sweet spice. Very good with lots of character.	12.5%	2016- 2017	£35.50	The Flying Corkscrew
Chartogne-Taillet, Les Couarres, Extra Brut 2010	15.5 (85)	16	14.5	16	An oaky aroma, with nicely balanced sweet and savoury notes behind that. The fizz is gentle and pleasant, with richness and acidity in fine balance.	12%	2017- 2020	£42	Vine Trail
Duménil, Nature, Brut Nature NV	15.5 (85)	16	16.5	14	A classic Brut Nature nose: a palaeontologist's dream. The palate has a cerebral dimension, with spring flowers and red apples with nice length.	12%	2016- 2018	£29.50	Crush
Laherte Frères, Blanc de Blancs, Brut Nature NV	15.5 (85)	15	14.5	17	Nose of peony and hints of elderflower. Nicely handled, showing citrus and floral character. Acidity on the finish is crisp, right on the edge.	12%	2017- 2020	£32.95	Berry Bros & Rudd
Olivier Horiot, Métisse Noirs & Blancs Les Riceys, Extra Brut NV	15.5 (85)	15.5	15	16	Rich and oaky style, spicy and red fruit, typical of Pinot. The palate has a velvety character, quite savoury and expressive with lots of energy.	12%	2017- 2020	£34.20	The Sampler
Veuve Fourny & Fils, Monts de Vertus Premier Cru, Extra Brut 2009	15.5 (85)	16	15	15.5	Forward, expressive nose of hedgerow and ripe fruit; the palate underlines this elegantly. An approachable style from a warm vintage.	12%	2020- 2018	£48	Vin Cognito
Bruno Paillard, Rosé Première Cuvée, Extra Brut NV	15.25 (84)	15	16	15	Appealing aroma of damask rose with a weightier palate holding firm acidity and a savoury finish. Long and complete, with understated power.	12%	2016- 2018	£55	Quintessentially, Selfridges, Wholefoods
De Venoge, Cordon Bleu, Extra Brut NV	15.25 (84)	16	16	14	Boldly effervescent style, with a nose of apple charlotte and soft spice.  The palate is also soft, belying the putative style somewhat.	12%	2015- 2017	£36-£42	Zonin UK
Dosnon, Récolte Brute, Extra Brut NV	15.25 (84)	15	15	15.5	A confidently oaky nose, brimming with potential. The palate is a highly individual one, for the oakier, full-bodied style.	12%	2016- 2020	£36.95	Roberson
Doyard, Cuvée Vendémiaire Premier Cru, Extra Brut NV	15.25 (84)	14.5	15.5	16	A hint of honey with oak on the nose. The palate displays yellow fruit, almonds and poached pear. Impressive persistence.	12.5%	2016- 2018	£35	Stannary St Wine Co
Fleury, Notes Blanches, Brut Nature NV	15.25 (84)	15.5	15	15	Aromatic nose of honey, spring flowers and hints of nougat. Palate is crisp and fresh with flint and orchard fruit, relatively soft.	12.5%	2016- 2018	£47- £49.99	AG Wines, Ministry of Drinks, Sustainable Wines UK, Vintage Roots
Gosset, Celebris Rosé, Extra Brut 2007	15.25 (84)	15	14.5	16	Very elegant, creamy, fruity and peppery with a good level of acidity, which carries the wine forward.	12%	2016- 2020	£135- £160	Champagne Direct, Great Grog, Harvey Nichols, Speciality Drinks, The Haslemere Cellar
J Dumangin Fils, Extra Brut NV	15.25 (84)	15	15	15.5	Ripe and with good maturity, quite soft for an Extra Brut but not without pleasure. Its high percentage of Meunier lends approachability and charm.	12%	2016- 2022	£32	Yapp Bros
Larmandier-Bernier, Terre de Vertus Premier Cru, Brut Nature 2009	15.25 (84)	15.5	15.5	14.5	Nose of quince and some fig. The palate does not lack for energy, but has a gently spicy character, which appeals.	12.5%	2016- 2017	£39.50- £43.25	H2Vin, Lea & Sandeman, WoodWinters
Veuve Fourny & Fils, Les Rougesmonts Rosé Premier Cru, Extra Brut NV	15.25 (84)	15	15	16	A deep strawberry colour, then a nose dominated by raspberry and plum.  Vinous, food-friendly and ready to drink.	12%	2016- 2018	£38	Vin Cognito
Vincent Couche, Zéro Dosage 2003	15.25 (84)	16	14.5	15	Straw lemon colour and a nose which is slightly evolved, with hints of caramel and ginger. Natural richness and poised weight without loss of freshness.	12.5%	2016- 2018	£39.25	The Flying Corkscrew
De Sousa, Mycorhize, Extra Brut 2010	15 (83)	15.5	15	14.5	Forthright, energetic bubbles. Nose of Vienna patisserie and clove. Palate has a chocolatey warmth, bruised apple maturity and hints of fig.	12.5%	2016- 2020	N/A UK	www.champagnedesousa.com
Jacquart, Extra Brut NV	15 (83)	15	14.5	15.5	A nose dominated by late-season fruit character and a touch of nuttiness. Slightly disjointed between palate and nose.	12.5%	2016- 2017	£32.50	Great Western Wine
Laurent-Perrier, Ultra Brut,	15 (83)	14.5	16.5	14	Rich colour, almost luminous, then an oaky nose, with hints of oatmeal and baking spice. Hints of melon as well as citrus on the mid-weight palate.	12%	2016- 2018	£42.99- £59.99	Berry Bros & Rudd, Oddbins, The Finest Bubble, The Solent Cellar, Virgin Wines

**Fair** 13-14.75pts (76-82pts)

■ Doyard, Oeil de Perdrix Grand Cru Rosé, Extra Brut 2011 14.75 (82) ■ Boizel, Ultime, Extra Brut NV 14.5 (81)

■ Janisson & Fils, Brut Nature NV 14.25 (80+)

■ R&L Legras, Extra Brut NV 14.25 (80+) ■ Autréau, Premier Cru, Extra Brut NV 13.75 (79) ■ Larmandier-Bernier, Latitude, Extra Brut NV 13.25 (77) **Poor** 11–12.75pts (70-75+pts)

■ Olivier Horiot, Sève Rosé de Saignée en Barmont, Extra Brut 2009 12 (73)

For full UK stockist details, see p116 >>

# **Champagne Brut Nature & Extra Brut**

## My top three Michael Edwards

■ Veuve Fourny. Cuvée R Premier Cru, Extra Brut NV A tribute to the late father of the two Fourny brothers. Pure Vertus (sourced mainly from Monts Ferrés), this is partly fermented in oak, in Papa's style. Shows powerful personality, vet has lift and a racy finesse.

17.5/20 (91/100) Drink 2016-2029

- Louis Roederer, Philippe Starck, Brut Nature 2006 Roederer's first-ever Nature made on the principle of a warm vintage in suntrap village of Cumières. Composed of all three varieties picked on same day to highlight terroir. Warmth, generosity in Pinots, with abiding finesse. 17 (90) Drink 2016-2017
- Veuve Fourny, Cuvée du Clos Notre Dame, Extra Brut 2006 True walled vineyard, classified by local canons in the 19th century. Warm harvest, subsoil on purest chalk and subtle oak combine in complex citrus, mineral-rich flavours of class and delicacy. Keeper to 2025. Still a baby. 17 (90) Drink 2017-2020

# My top three

Simon Field MW

- André Jacquart, Mesnil Experience Blanc de Blancs Grand Cru, Brut **Nature NV** The extended name of this outstanding example tells us all we need to know here. I was overwhelmed by the maturity and richness of this wine, guite astonishing given the complete lack of sugar. 18/20 (93/100) Drink 2016-2018
- Chartogne-Taillet, Ste-Anne, Extra Brut NV Really enjoyable. This cuvée is fermented only in stainless steel, but this Merfy producer manages to bring out the best characteristics of both Chardonnay and Pinot Noir with great aplomb. 17.5 (91) Drink 2017-2020
- **■** Larmandier-Bernier, Vieille Vignes de Cramant Grand Cru, Extra Brut 2006 An outstanding example. I loved its generous style, its spicy richness and the sheer power on the finish. Plenty more to give here... 17 (90) Drink 2017-2020

# My top three

Xavier Rousset MS

■ Veuve Fourny & Fils. Blanc de **Blancs Premier Cru, Brut Nature NV** 

Veuve Fourny's Champagnes often come out with high marks when I taste them blind. Under the radar for most of us, but worth highlighting, and of course tasting! 17.5/20 (91/100) Drink 2016-2020

- André Jacquart, Mesnil Experience Blanc de Blancs Grand Cru, Brut Nature NV Delighted to see the hard work and quality-driven decisions of this family-owned domaine are paying off. The oak is better handled than it has ever been, giving good texture and an elegant finish. 17 (90) Drink 2016-2018
- AR Lenoble, Dosage Zéro, Brut **Nature NV** I rediscovered this family domaine recently: a great example of a passionate, energetic brother-and-sister team working hard to improve quality - and it shows. 16.5 (88) Drink 2016-2018

NB: the tasters' top wines are not necessarily their top-scoring, rather those which, on learning the wines' identity, they feel are the most notable given their provenance, price or other factors

# **Expert summary:** Michael Edwards

In what can be a demanding style, the wines themselves tend to require favourable vintage conditions to be at their best. But when it all comes together, they can excel



Michael Edwards has been a freelance wine writer since 1990, specialising in Champagne

57 CHAMPAGNES TASTED in the Extra Brut/Brut Nature category yielded goodish, sometimes excellent results - though none today was unanimously judged worthy of gold standard. I would suggest that there are a couple reasons why. Thirty of the wines were non-vintage: years in these blends were not disclosed. At the risk of repetition, I think it's worth emphasising my guess again that they were often based on 2010 and 2011, vintages that had significant pre-harvest rain, dilution and lack of ripeness, particularly in Pinot Noir and Meunier - not ideal for this more austere category. The other reason is less verifiable, but intuitively sensed: the weather on the day of the tasting was dull and overcast, and many agree that this can have an effect on the way wines taste. Certainly wines that one knows well did taste less good on this occasion.

Moving to the positive, 10 wines stood out, scoring between 16.75 and 17.5 - these are fine wines by any standard. Pure Chardonnay or Chardonnay-led cuvées were impressive, particularly from those artisans who know how to make successful low-dosage wines, such as André Jacquart, Veuve Fourny and Gosset. Of the three-way Pinot-Chardonnay-Meunier blends, Pol Roger Pure was what it says on the tin - fresh, invigorating and without asperity. Some respected names surprisingly faltered from their usually high standards on the day, notably Larmandier-Bernier, R&L Legras, Janisson & Fils.

I would also like to have seen some other very honourable Extra Brut/Nature wines that were not shown here, especially Union Champagne de Mesnil; JL Vergnon's Mesnil prestige Confidence; Marie-Noëlle Ledru's pure Ambonnay Pinot Noir; and a promising newcomer from Ecueil, Domaine Lacourte Godbillon.

The moral of the day is that this very dry category depends on ripe vintage conditions, ideal in a forward charmer like 2006. It's unlikely to work every year. In contrast to Louis Roederer's historic tradition of a fairly conventional dosage, its Philippe Starck Brut Nature 2006 is a bold initiative, but one that won't be repeated until the release of the 2009, another sunny year.

'This category is best handled by producers who favour old vines, great terroirs and late picking'



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Grand Cru Classé en 1855 - Pauillac

# Sauternes and Barsac 2011 & 2013

When the conditions are right and noble rot works its magic, these neighbouring regions produce some of the world's finest sweet wines. Ian D'Agata reports

SAUTERNES AND BARSAC are the world-famous sweet wines of Bordeaux, though this part of France produces other similarly luscious wines (such as, Loupiac, Cérons, Saussignac and Cadillac) that can also be outstanding in many vintages. Rarely, however, do they reach the same lofty heights – or prices.

In those vintages in which weather conditions are just right, Sauternes and Barsac are home to unforgettable wines. I still remember a 1967 Suduiraut – one of the first great wines I ever tasted in my life; it went a long way in forging my desire to become a wine writer.

The Sauternes region is located 40km southeast of the city of Bordeaux, in the southern end of the Graves wine district. Though it is commonplace to refer to all the sweet wines made there as 'Sauternes', in fact there are five different communes: Sauternes, Barsac, Preignac, Bommes and Fargues. While all the wines made in the region can be labelled Sauternes, producers in Barsac may label their wines under the Barsac appellation, should they choose to do so. This is not a bad idea as Barsac's silty, alluvial soils tend to give wines of greater freshness and lightness than the other communes – all known for creamier, rounder wines.

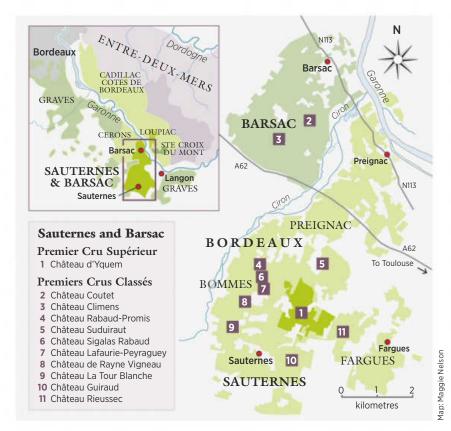
#### **Noble rot**

Much like Bordeaux' famous châteaux classification, Sauternes and Barsac have their own ranking, which was also presented at the 1855 World Expo in Paris.

Just like the Médoc, the Sauternes region is subjected to the same highly variable maritime climate, and so vintages are all-important. Perhaps even more important than in the Médoc, as the area is famous for the presence of noble rot – a fungus (Botrytis cinerea) that awakens under specific weather and geographical conditions. Primarily this is when the different water temperatures of the two rivers (the Garonne and its tributary the Ciron) mix, giving rise to morning mists. Additionally, on warm, sunny days grapes can dry and concentrate without being ravaged by grey rot or other diseases.

If and when all this occurs, noble rot can then attack the grapes, contributing greater concentration, acidity and complexity to the wines. It also adds recognisable aromas and flavours, ranging from hints of varnish to nail polish, intense tropical fruit notes and smoke, that may not be to every wine lovers liking. Therefore, knowing a little about each vintage is important in picking wines that will prove most suited to your palate.

The 2011 and 2013 vintages are two of the best for Sauternes and Barsac since 1990; only 1997, 2001, 2005, 2009, 2010 and 2014 are most likely superior (especially 2001). The 2011s are opulent, rich wines characterised by great freshness and an endearing, easy-drinking quality, while the 2013s are marked by a noble rot bonanza, though it is a vintage of more uneven quality and lacking the high peaks of 2011.



## Sauternes & Barsac: know your vintages

2014 Outstanding year of pure wines marked by lemony botrytis and high acidity.

2013 Very good year but uneven quality; for the most part, top names did well.

2012 Difficult year in which many estastes did not make their grand vin. Barsac wines fared best.

2011 Opulent, very precise wines with a light-on-their-feet quality.

2010 Discreet and ageworthy wines with high acidity, but very well balanced. More delicate than 2009 and 2011

2009 Rich, decadent and opulent. Some blowsy and over the top, others among the best Sauternes ever made.

## **Sauternes & Barsac: the facts**

**Grape varieties** Semillion, Sauvignon Blanc, Sauvignon Gris and Muscadelle

Area under vine 2,000 ha

Cases produced 480,000 a year

Estate size Fewer than 20 estates own more than 20ha; 160 estates own less 5ha

Classed growths (1855 Classification) Premier Cru Supérieur (1 – Château d'Yquem); Premier Cru (11); Deuxième Cru (15) lan D'Agata is an awardwinning wine writer who covers Sauternes and Barsac en primeur for Decanter ➤

# The results

When high residual sugars were balanced by zingy acidity, these wines showed why they are so highly regarded – the 2011s just pipping the 2013s in quality. John Stimpfig reports on a successful tasting

THERE WAS NO question that our tasters were upbeat about the quality and value of these two sweet wine wine vintages, noting that they were certainly superior to their dry red equivalents in Bordeaux. However, they were less optimistic about Sauternes' popularity and future among drinkers and collectors. 'It's still a very tough sell,' commented Xavier Rousset MS. 'People just aren't buying it. And that is such a shame because drinkers are really missing out. The decline in sales of Sauternes is in no way a reflection of quality.

'Overall, I thought this was a pretty strong tasting, with few poor wines and plenty of good ones,' he added. So too did Stephen Brook and Sebastian Payne MW, who concurred that these are two very good years book-ending the lacklustre 2012 vintage.

Comparing the two, Brook noted that the 2013s had 'a sort of solidity', whereas the 2011s had 'more raciness and flair'. Payne agreed 2011 was better than '13, but also commented on the fact that 'We gave two Outstandings to 2013 and only one to 2011, which I can't easily explain. That's the nature of blind tastings!'

'If the growers did have a problem in 2011, it was

'I wish we could persuade more consumers to buy these remarkable wines' Sebastian Payne MW

because the fruit had too much botrytis,' Brook said.
'At Yquem, they even picked some non-botrytised fruit to give it some freshness. The 2013s weren't at the same level because it was such a difficult growing season.'

According to Payne, '2013 was more up and down because, while there was noble rot, there was also grey rot. And some of the wines were not clean to taste. The key to success was often the healthiness or otherwise of the raw material.'

All three tasters picked up on an ongoing trend in Sauternes regarding rising sweetness levels. In particular, Brook drew attention to the fact that in both vintages sugar levels were sometimes up to 180 grams per litre – almost double what they were 25 years ago. However, that didn't concern him unduly, providing the wines

## The scores

33 wines tasted

3 Outstanding

12

Highly recommended

16

Recommended

2

O

O Faulty

# The tasters' verdicts

# Stephen Brook



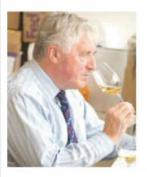
Brook has been a contributing editor to Decanter since 1996 and has won a clutch of awards for his writing on wine. The author of more than 30 books, his works include Complete Bordeaux, now the definitive study of the region and in its second edition. Brook also fully revised the last two editions of Hugh Johnson's Wine Companion.

#### Brook's verdict

'Sandwiching the less-than-distinguished 2012 are these two fine years. The 2013 vintage may have been a nightmare for red wine producers, but the combination of wamth and humidity suited Sauternes just fine. Even so it wasn't an easy vintage, with uneven ripening, and some grey rot among the noble rot. Overall 2011 was better: an easy harvest, with high acidity from the cool summer plus abundant botrytis in September.

'This was a very impressive tasting, with just a few disappointing wines, and nearly all of those from 2013. But the style of Sauternes has been changing. Some 25 years ago, 120 grams of residual sugar would have been considered unusually high; today 150g/l – even 180g/l – is common. As a consequence alcohol levels are lower (13.5% rather than 15%), but very high sugar can be problematic if it's not balanced by acidity. Fortunately many top wines achieved exactly that. These are Sauternes moving in the direction of German trockenbeerenauslesen, yet without losing the opulence and typicity of Sauternes. The 2011s can be bought with confidence. The 2013s require more careful selection.'

# Sebastian Payne MW



Payne joined the wine trade in 1970 and three years later started at The Wine Society as promotions manager. In 1977 he passed the Master of Wine exams and in 1985 was appointed chief buyer. Having stepped down as chief buyer in 2011, Payne remains an integral part of The Wine Society's buying team, as well as writing for the Society List and website.

#### Payne's verdict

'I'm constantly amazed and delighted at the fine quality of many Sauternes châteaux in recent vintages. This tasting was a reminder that the reputation of white Bordeaux – in this case, the great sweet wines – should not rest on the received opinion of claret vintages.

'Both 2013 and 2011 are relatively weak for claret but this is not the case for Sauternes, and it would be a shame if these wines slip out of the limelight. The 2011 vintage is the riper, fuller-bodied year, but there are great successes in the fresher, more lively 2013s from châteaux who picked and selected in the short window of opportunity when noble rot was at its best. The fine Yquem and Climens, capable of developing for decades, need most time in bottle to show their worth and were underrated here (see p108). Lamothe Guignard looks a bargain in 2011, if not in 2013, and Caillou surprised me for the first time in many years. I did not note a preference for Barsac or Sauternes in either year.

'The great Sauternes will last comfortably for three decades or more but my shortlist is for wines that look great value here.'

# Sauternes and Barsac 2011 & 2013

were balanced. 'I gave some of my top scores to wines with very high residual sugar, providing they had sufficient counterpoint freshness,' he said. 'Without this acidity, the wines tended to be more one-dimensional and much less interesting.

The panel did debate what was behind this. Brook argued that higher sugar and lower alcohol levels might make the wines more accessible when younger. 'I do think that the initial sugar kick makes most of these wines attractive when young. For instance, I think you could drink most of them from 2016 or 2017. This never used to be the case.'

But will they age as well as their forebears? Again, it came back to balance. 'The best wines will keep for 40 years unless they lack acidity in the first place. They might be a problem to sell, but there's no problem at all in ageing them,' said Payne.

'I wish we could persuade more consumers to buy and open these remarkable wines, which the producers make out of love because they certainly don't do it for financial gain,' added Payne. 'For me, Sauternes is and always will be one of the great wine styles of the world because the wines are so glorious to drink and keep for such a long time. And they are such ridiculously good value for money.'

Entry criteria: producers and UK agents were invited to submit the 2013 and 2011 vintages of their Sauternes and Barsac grands crus classés

# Outstanding 18.5-20pts (95-100pts)



#### Château La Tour Blanche, Sauternes 2013

Decanter average score: 18.75/20pts (95+/100pts)
Individual judges' scores: Stephen Brook 18.5 Sebastian Payne MW 18.5
Xavier Rousset MS 19

## $\pounds 42\text{-}\pounds 55 \,\, \mathsf{Bordeaux}\, \mathsf{Gold}, \mathsf{Corkr}, \mathsf{Fine}\, \&\, \mathsf{Rare}$

Founded by Jean St-Marc du Latourblanche, the estate was gifted to the French government in 1909 with the agreement that a wine school was to be created on its grounds, and so the La Tour Blanche School of Viticulture and Enology was born. There are about 40ha, planted mianly to Semillon (83%) with a little bit of Sauvignon Blanc (12%) and Muscadelle (5%). The wines of La Tour Blanche are known for their great richness and sweetness.

**Stephen Brook** Fine apricot nose, with considerable purity of fruit and integrated oak. Lean and precise, very sweet but has balancing acidity to give a surprising raciness. Not an especially voluptuous style, and the fruit is slightly candied, but it's svelte and delicious.

**Sebastian Payne MW** Quietly confident, properly luscious Sauternes with a creamy palate. Quite discreet but will last well and give enormous pleasure.

**Xavier Rousset MS** Elegant with very pretty fruit and weight. The oak is well handled which shows on the long and complex palate. Very pleasant indeed.

Drink 2016-2040 Alcohol 13.5%



## Château Lafaurie-Peyraguey, Sauternes 2013

18.5 (95) **SB** 18.5 **SP** 18.5 **XR** 18.5

## $£35 - £36 \,\, \text{Bordeaux Gold, Fine \& Rare, Paramount Vintners}$

Now owned by Lalique magnate Silvio Denz, the estate was a fortress in the 13th century and takes its current name from Sieur Raymond Peyraguey, who purchased the property in 1618 and from M Lafaurie, who bought it in 1796. The estate boasts 41ha under vine, of which some are exceptionally old, planted in the late 1920s. Semillon is most planted (93%), with a little Sauvignon Blanc (6%) and Muscadelle (1%). The wines are admired for their unique balance of power and elegance.

SB Discreetly oaky nose dominates the underlying pineapple and apricot fruit. Very sweet attack, silky and almost racy, with fine purity. This has finesse and poise, and the balance and acidity should ensure a good evolution. Slightly exotic and candied with very good length.

**SP** Creamy and rich, this has considerably more depth than most in this vintage. For me, this is the star of the tasting.

XR Nose and palate of mango, quince and apricot. Balanced with well-integrated oak; rich but still has real finesse and character.

Drink 2017-2040 Alc 13.5% >>

## Xavier Rousset MS



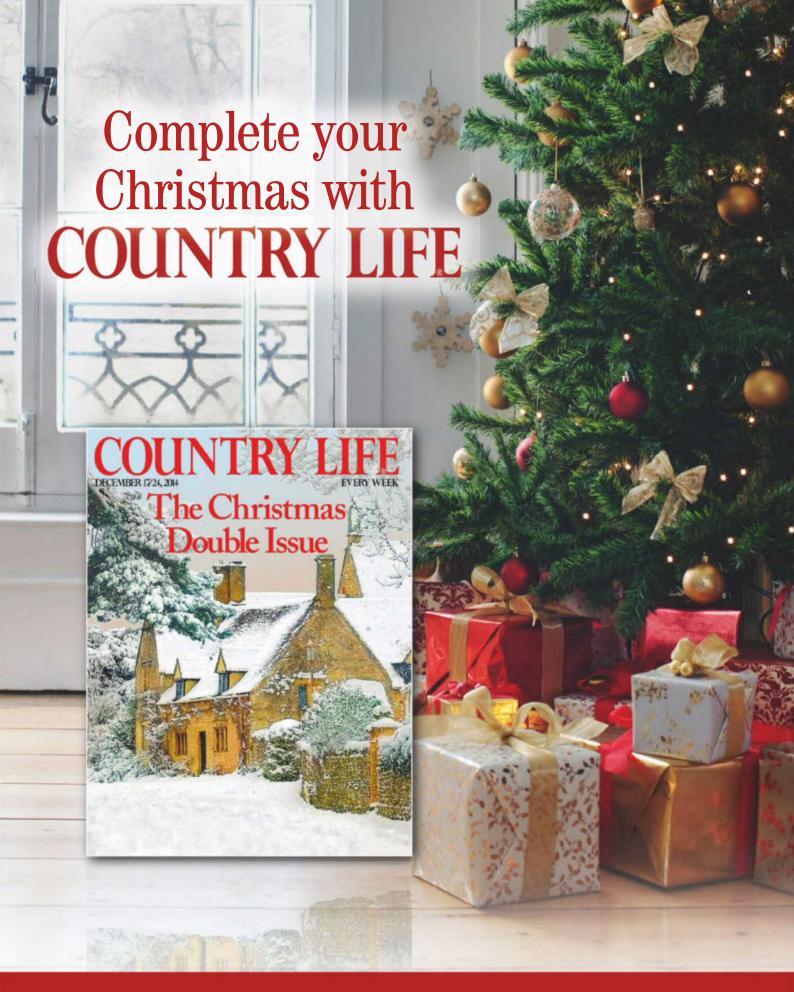
Rousset became the youngest Master Sommelier in the world in 2002, when working at Bristol's Hotel du Vin. Head sommelier at Le Manoir aux Quat' Saisons from 2004, Rousset and head chef Agnar Sverrisson launched Texture in London in 2007, winning a Michelin star in 2010. Their second venture, 28°-50° Wine Workshop and Kitchen, launched in 2010. Rousset is currently working on new projects for 2016.

#### Rousset's verdict

'Overall, a very high standard for both vintages, with 2011 the better, showing great concentration, good acidity and fine balance. Wines from top estates probably need more time to fully express their potential and complexity, and to allow the oak to better integrate (in some cases it was too obvious, making the wine unbalanced and that much heavier when so young).

'The 2013s are also good but less homogenous and many top estates were disappointing, such as Guiraud, Coutet and Lamothe Guignard which had high scores in 2011, while their 2013 struggled.

'I wonder why Sauternes, which is facing a sales crisis, doesn't focus more on producing half bottles? Prices would be even more competitive and consumers would not need to feel guilty in enjoying 375ml with their meal. Having said that, even at a 750ml bottle price, Sauternes is already among the best-value wines in the world.'



The Christmas Double PLUS free Travel magazine, on sale December 16, 2015

www.countrylife.co.uk

# Sauternes and Barsac 2011 & 2013

# Outstanding (continued) 18.5-20pts (95-100pts)



#### Château Doisy-Daëne, Barsac 2011 18.5 (95) **SB** 18.5 **SP** 18.5 **XR** 18.5

£45-£55 Corkr, Fine & Rare, Lay & Wheeler

In the late 1880s, owner Jacques Emmanuel Daëne added his family name to that of the vineyard's (Doisy). In 1924 it was bought by Georges Dubourdieu and the estate is now being run by Denis Dubordiueu, one of Bordeaux' most famous consulting winemakers, as well as an esteemed University of Bordeaux oenology professor known the world over for his important research work. The 16ha vineyard is

planted to 80% Semillon and 20% Sauvignon. The wines are noted for their refinement and grace, often showing a mineral, almost-Riesling like quality. In exceptional years, a top cuvée is made, L'Extravagant.

SB Smoky apricot and passion fruit nose, very stylish, with nicely judged oak. Sleek and seductive, this has gorgeous fruit and vibrant acidity. Very concentrated and intense, with distinct but classy oak, a silky texture and great persistence. Very long.

SP Intensely sweet but fresh too. Ticks all the boxes, and makes for a very good wine.

XR Great nose and the complex palate is equally harmonious despite a high level of residual sugar. This plus a lovely lengthy finish shows this was created by a skilled winemaker.

Drink 2016-2040 Alc 13%

# Highly Recommended 17-18.25pts (90-94pts)



#### Château Rieussec, Sauternes 2011

17.75 (92) SB 18 SP 18 XR 17.25

£33-£38 Bordeaux Index, Fine & Rare

Lush, waxy, stone-fruit nose, with some honey and botrytis tones. The natural acidity will keep this alive for many years. Very rich, succulent and velvety, with grip, structure and lots of finesse. Drink 2017-2040 Alc 14%



#### Château Coutet, Barsac 2011

17.5 (91) SB 18.5 SP 17.5 XR 16.5

£41-£48 Bordeaux Gold, Fine & Rare, Lay & Wheeler, Millésima

Voluptuous apricot and pineapple nose that is quite lifted and aromatic. Racy with great purity of fruit and concentration but not too dense. Tangy with excellent balance and a fine future. Delicious! Drink 2016-2035 Alc 14%



#### Château Doisy-Daëne, Barsac 2013

17 (90) SB 17.75 SP 16.5 XR 17

£27.50-£28.33 Bordeaux Gold, Corkr, Millésima, Lay & Wheeler

Elegant apple and apricot nose, with some honey and oak in the background. The palate is waxy with well-integrated oak and some floral notes. Has a persistent finish despite modest acidity. Drink 2016-2028 Alc 13.5%



#### **Château Guiraud, Sauternes 2011**

17.75 (92) SB 17 SP 18 XR 18

£50-£58 Berry Bros & Rudd, Cru Wine World,

Lush apple compote and apricot nose with a kiss of oak and a hint of lanolin. Unctuous texture - rich and powerful - but with enough fruit and acidity to balance. A unique, luscious but lively style. Drink 2017-2040 Alc 13.5%



#### **Clos Haut-Peyraguey, Sauternes** 2011 17.5 (91) SB 17.75 SP 17 XR 17.5

£34-£36 Bordeaux Index, Corkr, Fine & Rare, Millésima

Reticent nose of apple and apricot. Palate of unctuous texture with honey and ginger notes. Very high acidity makes for an invigorating drink. The spicy finish lingers, and ensures it will develop nicely. Drink 2016-2035 Alc 13.5%



## Château La Tour Blanche, Sauternes 2011 17 (90) SB 17.25 SP 17.5

**XR** 16 5

£29-£35 Corkr, Fine & Rare, Millésima Has real class and fine balance between acidity and richness. A lean palate, sleek with exotic fruit and mint. Long, spicy and precise with brooding fruit that will resurface with some time. Drink 2016-2030 Alc 14%



#### Château Lamothe Guignard, Sauternes 2011 17.75 (92) SB 18.5 SP 18.5 **XR** 16

£15.50-£17.50 Bordeaux Gold, Corkr, Fine & Rare Firm, oaky nose, with ample stone fruits and mango lurking beneath. This has finesse and class yet is easy to appreciate. A stunning wine with fine concentration and acidity with a long, pineapple finish. Drink 2016-2045 Alc 14%



#### Château Suduiraut, Sauternes 2013

17.25 (90+) **SB** 17.25 **SP** 17.5 **XR** 16.75

£41.83-£45 Bordeaux Gold, Cru Wine World, Fine & Rare, Millésima

A rich style with lots of botrytis and an oily texture. Discreet mango and peach nose while the palate has good underlying acidity with a marked pineapple character. Will age well. Drink 2016-2035 Alc 13.5%



#### Château Doisy-Védrines, Sauternes 2013 17 (90) SB 16.5 SP 17.5 XR 17

£21-£24 Bordeaux Gold, Fine & Rare, Millésima Heady, waxy nose shows botrytis, honey and ripe stone fruits. A good interpretation of the vintage, this is surprisingly forward and approachable with a lovely texture and finesse. Finishes long with a real zing. Drink 2016-2030 Alc 13.5% >>

# Sauternes and Barsac 2011 & 2013

# Highly Recommended 17-18.25pts (90-94pts)



### Château Caillou, Sauternes 2011

17 (90) **SB** 16 **SP** 18 **XR** 17

£20.50 corkr

Delicate floral nose with intense flavours of mango, quince and ginger. Rich and svelte palate with good acidity to give plenty of cut and bite. Where else in the world can you find such a luscious wine with such a lovely finish? Drink 2016-2040 Alc 13.5%



### **Château Suduiraut, Sauternes 2011**

17 (90) SB 18 SP 17.5 XR 15.5

£39-£56 Corkr, Fine & Rare, Millésima, VinQuinn Opulent nose of apples, apricots and honey. Rich and creamy palate in a voluptuous style but with enough underlying acidity to keep it fresh. You can almost taste the skins of the grapes bursting with extract and life force. Drink 2017-2050 Alc 13.5%



#### Château Doisy-Védrines, **Sauternes 2011** 17 (90) SB 16.75 SP 16.5

£26-£28.50 Fine & Rare, Four Walls Wine Co, Haynes Hanson & Clark, Lay & Wheeler Charming apricot nose which is not sumptuous but elegant. Sweet but lean, with silky, textured stone fruits and pineapple. Not a heavyweight but lively and balanced, with a candied finish. Drink 2017-2030 Alc 13.5%

## Recommended (continued) 15-16.75pts (83-89pts)

Wine	Score	SB	SP	XR	Tasting note	Alc	Drink	Price	Stockists
Clos Haut-Peyraguey, Sauternes 2013	16.75 (89)	17.5	16.5	16.5	Heady nose of peaches and honey. Voluptuous palate with integrated oak and distinct botrytis. Fine balance of crisp acidity and seductive fruit.	13.5%	2016- 2030	£25-£27	Fine & Rare, Millésima
Château de Myrat, Sauternes 2011	16.75 (89)	19	15	16.5	Smoky with sumptuous fruit and a creamy, unctuous palate that is fleshy and concentrated. Built to last with great intensity and excellent length.	13%	2016- 2040	£21	Corkr
Château d'Yquem, Sauternes 2011	16.75 (89)	15.5	17.5	17.5	Still sleeping but full of promise, and just now a little veiled by oak. Luscious and characterful enough to emerge triumphant as a polished performer.	14%	2018- 2040	£277	Bordeaux Index, Corney & Barrow
Château de Myrat, Sauternes 2013	16.75 (89)	16.5	17	16.5	Fresh, aromatic nose with a herbal side. Sweet, intense palate, with a silky texture and a bright minty note to balance the opulent apple and apricot fruit.	13%	2016- 2028	£18.92- £22	Bordeaux Gold, Millésima
Château Filhot, Sauternes 2011	16.75 (89)	16.5	17	16.5	Fruit compote nose with a lively palate of ginger, tropical fruits and positive acidity to balance. Lots of fruit and extract makes for a rich palate.	13.5%	2016- 2035	£21-£24	Bordeaux Gold, Fine & Rare
Château Rayne Vigneau, Sauternes 2011	16.75 (89)	17	17	16	Lanolin, apricot and peach aroma. Full of extract and splendidly rich though has enough acidity to stay fresh. True Sauternes character coming through.	13%	2016- 2035	£27	Corkr, Fine & Rare
Château Climens, Barsac 2011	16.25 (87)	15.5	17	16.5	Heady nose with a dominant apple character and a creamy-textured broad palate. Shows solid fruit with bags of flavour and spice. Will deliver in time.	13.5%	2016- 2035	£82	Bordeaux Index
Château Climens, Barsac 2013	16.25 (87)	16.25	17	15.5	Aromatic and expressive with a silky palate and good fruit intensity. Stone fruits and wax linger with a hint of mandarin. Has good extract and length.	14%	2016- 2030	£87	Bordeaux Index
Château Broustet, Sauternes 2011	16.25 (87)	16.75	16	16	Quite oaky on the nose but has ample underlying peach and passion fruit tones, giving it an exotic sheen. This is a food wine.	12.5%	2016- 2035	£19	Fine & Rare
Château de Rayne Vigneau, Sauternes 2013	16 (86)	15	15.5	17.5	Honey, wet wool and floral notes with a rounded and forward palate. Shows great potential with a long and elegant finish.	13%	2016- 2030	£27-£32	Bordeaux Gold, Millésima
Château de Malle, Sauternes 2011	16 (86)	16.25	15.5	16	Lush, honeyed apricot and mango nose. An upfront style with immediacy of fruit and enough acidity to give it lift and persistence.	13%	2016- 2035	£24.50	Corkr, Fine & Rare
Château de Malle, Sauternes 2013	15.75 (85+)	17	14.5	16	Expressive nose of floral and peach. Broad but intense on the attack, with opulent fruit, integrated oak and far better acidity than most.	13%	2016- 2030	£23.50- £24.50	Bordeaux Gold, Corkr, Fine & Rare
Château Coutet, Barsac 2013	15.5 (85)	15.5	16.5	14.5	Ripe but somewhat earthy nose, with little overt botrytis character. Has a voluptuous texture but needs more precision. Sweet and piquant finish.	13.5%	2016- 2030	£24.75- £33	Bordeaux Gold, Berry Bros & Rudd, Corkr, Fine & Rare, Justerini & Brooks, Millésima
Château Lafaurie-Peyraguey, Sauternes 2011	15.5 (85)	14.5	16	16	Super-ripe pear notes with a sweet and juicy palate. Has texture and medium length but needs just a bit more personality to be great.	14%	2016- 2030	£31-£37	Fine & Rare, Millésima, RU Wines, Vinoa
Château Guiraud, Sauternes 2013	15.25 (84)	15.5	16	14.5	Nose is quite evolved and exotic with touches of apricot and obvious Sauvignon Blanc fruit. Quite juicy and straightforward with good acidity.	13.5%	2016- 2030	£38.46- £46	Berry Bros & Rudd, Corkr, Cru Wine World, Fine & Rare, Paramount Vintners, R&B Wines
Château Lamothe Guignard, Sauternes 2013	15 (83)	16.5	14	14.5	Burnished and complex nose, showing honey, peaches and passion fruit.  Rich and velvety, with good depth of fruit and concentration.	14%	2016- 2022	N/A UK	www.chateau-lamothe-guignard.fr

Fair 13-14.75pts (76-82pts)

■ Château Filhot, Sauternes 2013 14.75 (82)

■ Château Broustet, Sauternes 2013 14.5 (81)

For full UK stockist details, see p116

Next month's panel tastings Californian Cabernet 2012 and Fronsac & Canon-Fronsac



GRAND CRU CLASSÉ



# CHÂTEAU **DESMIRAIL**

**MARGAUX** 

**DENIS LURTON** 







CRU CLASSÉ EN 1855



# Sauternes and Barsac 2011 & 2013

# My top three Stephen Brook

■ Château Doisy-Daëne 2011 This second growth excelled in both vintages, but the 2011 was exceptional: vibrant, textured, intense and very long, with exquisite balance. Denis Dubourdieu and his two sons show complete command of the Sauternes style and this wine, though approachable now, will live for decades. 18.5/20 (95/100) Drink 2016-2040

#### ■ Château La Tour Blanche 2013

A triumph in 2013, and almost as good in 2011. Because it doubles as a wine college, this first growth is often overlooked, but in 1855 it was considered the finest wine after Yguem. Now we know why. 18.5 (95) Drink 2016-2040

#### ■ Château Lamothe-Guignard 2011

The Guignard brothers bought this run-down second growth in 1981 and turned things around. Not every vintage succeeds (the 2013 failed to excite), but this is both unctuous and elegant, and buying a bottle won't require a bank loan. 18.5 (95) Drink 2016-2045

# My top three

Sebastian Payne MW

■ Château Doisy-Daëne 2011 A tribute to the consummate skill and attention to detail of Denis Dubourdieu. Intensely sweet with high residual sugar, this is beautifully balanced with great fruit, acidity and freshness. 18.5/20 (95/100) **Drink** 2016-2040

#### ■ Château Lamothe Guignard 2011

When this small property gets it right, as it evidently did in 2011, this proves to be one of the bargain buys of the region. It has finesse, class and sex appeal, all at a good price. A smart buy. 18.5 (95) Drink 2016-2045

■ Château Guiraud 2011 The new ownership team has made a great estate finer and more consistent by cutting back production of its first wine. A high proportion (35%) of Sauvignon Blanc in the blend gave lift. Certified organic this year. 18 (93) Drink 2017-2040

# My top three

Xavier Rousset MS

■ Château La Tour Blanche 2011 What a great surprise! While I have tasted and sold many bottles of La Tour Blanche over the years, I wasn't expecting the level of finesse and elegance from this 2013. Very subtle use of oak, lovely texture and great depth. Well done! 19/20 (96/100) Drink 2016-2040

#### ■ Château Lafaurie-Peyraguey 2013

I've always been impressed by this estate and the 2013 is another good vintage. Silvio Denz bought the domaine in 2014 with a quality-focused, long-term vision. This will potentially be a game-changer for this estate if the ambitions of the new ownership are reflected in the quality. 18.5 (95) Drink 2017-2040

■ Château Doisy-Daëne 2011 | really enjoyed this rich, complex and delicate style - a real stand-out for me in this tasting. 18.5 (95) Drink 2016-2040

NB: the tasters' top wines are not necessarily their top-scoring, rather those which, on learning the wines' identity, they feel are the most notable given their provenance, price or other factors

# Expert summary: Ian D'Agata

The scores were certainly respectable, but these vintages – especially 2011 – are even better than the results suggest, and I would have expected more Outstanding wines



lan D'Agata is an award-winning wine writer who covers Sauternes and Barsac en primeur for Decanter

FROM AN OUTSIDER'S point of view, an analysis of the results suggest this was a disappointing tasting, despite the judges' enthusiastic commentary. This is surprising because 2011 and 2013 are - and not just in my mind two of the better vintages (especially 2011) since 1990 for these glorious sweet wines. Only 45.5% of the wines scored 17/20 (90/100) or above - a disheartening scenario in vintages where Sauternes and Barsac totally outperformed Bordeaux's red wines. Yes, 64% of the wines scored a perfectly acceptable 16.75 (89) or above, but such a percentage must be viewed as disappointing in the context of such vintages.

Even though two of the three Outstanding wines were from 2013, unsurprisingly 10 of the top 15 wines (67%) were from the better, more consistent 2011 vintage. Conversely, seven of the worst performing wines on this day were 2013s.

Away from the stats, there were a few clear winners: La Tour Blanche, Doisy-Daëne, Suduiraut and Doisy-Védrines scored very well in 2011 and 2013 alike, with Clos Haut-Peyraguey and De Myrat also performing well in both vintages. Often underperforming châteaux such as De Malle and Broustet failed to excite the tasters in

either vintage. Filhot is well known to be hard to gauge accurately when young, and the so-so showing by Climens is also not surprising, given that the wine is a long-distance runner rather than a sprinter.

It's harder to explain the relatively low scores of the 2011 d'Yquem, 2011 Lafaurie-Peyraguy and 2013 Coutet, all of which I had rated at 18 or above en primeur, retasting them in 2012 and 2013 and again finding them to be outstanding wines. It is more than likely that, four years from the vintage, they have shut down and are revealing little of their potential greatness currently. Time will tell. Conversely, the 2013 Guiraud, which the tasters found to be slightly evolved and even oxidised, had already seemed to be low in acidity en primeur.

Given the broad expertise of the judges, the results are both interesting and useful; for example, monitoring the 2013s in your cellar might prove prudent.

'The results suggest this was a disappointing tasting, despite the judges' enthusiasm'

## château La Dominique

FRUIT DE L'ÉLÉGANCE



GRAND CRU CLASSÉ DE SAINT-ÉMILION

Vignobles Clément Fayat

W W W. C H A T E A U - L A D O M I N I Q U E . C O M

## Chilean Rhône reds

A renaissance in Carignan has helped kickstart a move toward minerally, savoury Rhône-style reds, particularly from southern regions. Peter Richards MW reports



CHILE MADE ITS name on the back of Bordeaux:
Cabernet, Merlot and
Sauvignon Blanc. Since the turn of the century, however, there has been a growing focus on
Mediterranean varieties, including those from the Rhône. Syrah is chief among these, having gone

from a standing start to nearly 8,000 hectares in just 15 years. But the likes of Grenache, Mourvedre, Carignan and Cinsault are also increasingly important.

The purpose of this tasting was to take a closer look at Chile's reds made from Rhône varieties – either single varietal or blends – but not based primarily on Syrah, which tends to hog the limelight. Some 37 wines were submitted for the blind tasting, held at *Decanter* HQ.

The most notable aspect of this line-up is the predominance of wines from Chile's south, especially Maule. The main reason for this is Carignan, which has more than 650ha planted in Chile. The past decade has seen a renaissance of this variety in Chile as forward-thinking winemakers have started to champion old, dry-farmed Carignan vineyards in southern Chile, many of which were planted in the 1930s and 1940s. Vigno is a shared trademark (much like a European appellation) for Carignan-based wines in coastal Maule. Recently, there's been a distinct move away from the wild, almost undrinkably intense styles of Carignan to a more linear, focused style, as espoused by the best examples here.

Both Grenache (87ha) and Mourvedre (70ha) have bright futures in Chile. The most successful ones major more on rugged minerality and savoury layerings than on sweet fruit, a welcome change of register for Chile.

'The rugged minerality and savoury layerings are a welcome change of register for Chile'

Peter Richards MW is the Decanter World Wine Awards Regional Chair for Chile

For full details of UK stockists, see p116



Above: winemakers have started to champion old, dry-farmed Carignan vineyards in southern Chile

It would have been nice to see a Cinsault (550ha) in the final selection, a grape that's capable of making joyful, bright, light reds, often from old, dry-farmed vines in Itata – but none shone on the day.

Diversity is already a feature of Chile's Rhône varietal output. From vivid, tangy coastal styles to the richer tones of Colchagua, you sense that the current crop is just a hint of what might emerge over time in a country that has a Mediterranean-style climate and the kind of degraded granite hillsides that Rhône varieties love. Carignan and Cinsault apart, many of the vines are still young, too.

As for caveats, these wines aren't cheap. It's also true that Chile's notoriously strict plant quarantine laws will impede the pace of progress. But the quality and diversity of these wines and others like them, as well as the looming prospect of global warming, vindicate Chile's desire to take inspiration from the Rhône and wider Mediterranean for its future, just as much as it has done from Bordeaux in its past.

### Richards' top 18 reds to try



Casa Marin, Viñedos Lo Abarca No3 Garnacha-Syrah, Lo Abarca, San Antonio 2013 18.5 (95)

N/A~UK~www.casamarin.cl

An arresting wine in both style and quality. Vivid, piercing aromas of black pepper, green olives and freshly cut thyme. Tense, focused palate is svelte and cogent. Midweight, almost ethereal. **Drink** 2016-2027 **Alcohol** 13%



## Lapostolle, Vigno Carignan, Empedrado, Maule 2013 18 (93)

£23.99 Berkmann

A striking example of the new breed of refreshing, tangy Maule Carignans. Tense and grippy, the aromas are still restrained, with notes of black pepper and dark cherry. But the energy and focus on the palate is tremendous. Will age well. **Drink** 2016-2025 **Alc** 13.5%



## Valdivieso, Eclat Vigno, Maule 2011 18 (93)

£16 (2009) Bibendum, Excel

A stylish wine where 33% Mourvedre tempers Carignan's wild, exuberant fruit, giving it a savoury, tea leaf edge that works brilliantly. Succulent and rounded, with flavours of dried cherry and roasted herbs. Bodes well for the future. **Drink** 2016-2026 **Alc** 14.5%

## **Chilean Rhône reds**



#### Garcia & Schwaderer, Grenache, Itata 2013 17.5 (91)

#### $N/A\ UK\ www.garciaschwaderer.cl$

Stunning! You might expect sweet, rich fruit from Grenache but this has a steely, rugged, stony quality in its brooding mineral force. Almost Piedmontese in style, with tremendous power. Drink 2016-2025 Alc 15%



#### Garcia & Schwaderer, Bravado, Itata 2013 17 (90)

#### £12.79 Naked Wines

From Felipe Garcia and Constanza Schwaderer, this is an inky, crunchy, invigorating blend of Carignan and Syrah with a splash of Grenache. Impressive, brooding power, minerality and layers of spice. Drink 2016-2020 Alc 14%



#### Concha y Toro, Vigno, Cauquenes, Maule 2013 16.5 (88)

#### £12 Concha y Toro UK

There's something of a Rosso di Montalcino character to this - earthy cherries with hints of dried flowers and a firm structure. Drink with food. Drink 2016-2020 Alc 14.5%



#### Morandé, Vigno, Maule 2012

£24.50 Barwell & Jones, House of Townend A rich, bold style based on Carignan with Syrah (and a splash of Chardonnay), aged in US and French oak. Plump, creamy, dark berry fruit is supported by lovely juicy acidity and fine grippy tannins. Drink 2016-2019 Alc 14.5%



#### Garcia & Schwaderer, **Mourvedre, Itata 2013** 16 (86)

#### N/A UK www.garciaschwaderer.cl

There's a modest, unassuming charm here that rewards the patient palate. Brooding, almost rusty style with flavours of herbs, hedgerow fruit and warm earth. Drink 2016-2018 Alc 14%



#### Lapostolle, Collection Mourvedre, Apalta, Colchagua **2013** 17.5 (91)

#### £23.99 Berkmann

This enchanting wine is a game-changer for Apalta, revealing its potential for elegantly savoury reds. Captivating violet aromas, lithe supple palate. Drink 2016-2017 Alc 13.5%



#### Undurraga, Vigno, Old Vines **Dry Farmed, Maule 2012** 17 (90)

#### POA Gonzalez Byass UK

A direct, assertive marriage of Carignan with the more perfumed, lighter Cinsault. Herbal, tangy sour cherry aromas. Sleek and tense, albeit with a fiery, intense finish. Focused and lithe. Drink 2016-2023 Alc 14.5%



#### Luis Felipe Edwards, Cien Carignan, Cauquenes, Maule **2012** 16.5 (88)

#### £19.99 North South Wines

Sleek and stylish, with juicy dark fruit, fine tannins and elegant herbs. A touch hot on the finish but engaging. Drink 2016-2022 Alc 14.5%



#### Tierra del Fuego, Edición Limitada Carignan, Maule 2013

16.5 (88)

#### N/A UK www.tdf.cl

This 100% Carignan isn't the most complex, but its succulent elegance is very appealing. Crunchy red fruit flavours with herbal tones and a lifted finish. Drink 2016-2017 Alc 14%



#### Odfjell, Orzada Mourvedre, **Cauquenes, Maule 2013** 16 (86)

#### POA Alliance

Elegant violets, graphite, cherry and talcum powder. Perfumed, with supple sour cherry flavours. Lots to like, though the alcohol is a touch high. Drink 2016-2017 Alc 15%



#### Carmen, Winemaker's **Carignan, Maule 2014** 17 (90)

#### £24.99 Hallgarten Druitt

Like biting into a ripe, dark cherry. It's all about upfront, bright fruit, lifted by floral tones. Intense and charming, with a slightly sweet, spritzy nature. Great with a plate of charcuterie. Drink 2016 Alc 13.6%



#### Viu Manent, ViBo Punta del **Viento, Colchagua 2012** 17 (90)

£15.99 Davy's, Spirited Wine, Wine Chambers For Rhône-loving masochists. This Grenache with Mourvedre and Syrah is restrained, with whispers of tea, dried fruit and pot pourri, but then explodes on the palate. Enjoy cautiously. Drink 2016-2020 Alc 15%



#### Mancura, Guardián Reserva **Carignan, Maule 2012** 16.5 (88)

#### N/A UK www.mancurawines.cl

Edgy, with curry leaf and gunflint notes that may be down to a reductive character, but it works in this peppery, sleek style. Savoury and appealing. Drink 2016-2022 Alc 14%



#### Garage Wine Co, Lot 39 **Carignan, Maule 2012** 16 (86)

£19-£20 Fine Wine Co, Le Vignoble, Solent Cellar, St Andrews Wine Co, Vagabond, Walker & Wodehouse Spicy, intense, energetic red. It's wild, bursting with dark berries and slightly fiery alcohol, but has good bones, juicy acidity and a capacity to age well. Drink 2016-2022 Alc 14.5%



#### Emiliana, Signos de Origen Garnacha-Syrah-Mourvedre, **Colchagua 2013** 15.5 (85)

£15 Highbury Vintners, Kwoff, Woodwinters Dark, rich, creamy, ripe and modern with a resinous hint. This new vintage should be on sale from early 2016. Drink 2016-2018 Alc 14%

# 34 festive buys



With even more recommendations this month and a higher price limit for the special occasion. Decanter's tastings director Christelle Guibert has picked out 34 exciting wines to try over the festive season. All are UK-available and perfect for drinking now

denotes supermarket and high-street wines



#### Veuve Fourny. Blanc de Blanc 1er Cru, Champagne, France NV 17 (90)

£21.50 The Wine Society This 100% Chardonnay from 40-year-old vines on premier cru vineyards displays finesse and elegance rarely found at this price level. Lemony intensity combined with fresh apples and a creamy mouthfeel. Easily one of the best-value





#### **Denbies, Cubitt Reserve Brut, Surrey, England** 2010 16.75 (89)

£26 Asda 😷

Denbies' first vines were planted in 1986 and it has since become England's largest vineyard owner with 107ha. From 22-year-old vines, this cuvée spent four years on its lees before release. Creamy, toasted brioche intensity are in balance with the apple and lemon fruit. Lovely weight, too. Alc 11.5%



#### Henri Dosnon, Brut Séléction, Champagne, France NV 16.75 (89)

£25 Roberson

Good-value Champagnes are hard to find, so don't miss out on this cuvée from a micronégociant that specialises in small quantity and value. Green apple fruit with lemon intensity, and crisp acidity on a complex palate. It's an elegant and light style of fizz that will make an excellent aperitif. Alc 12%



#### Lini 910. In Correggio Lambrusco Scuro, **Emilia, Italy NV** 17 (90)

£12.99 Booths 😷

This once unfashionable red fizz is making a comeback. Your preconceptions may be that it's a sweet, simple wine, but this is a dry, complex style packed with black cherries and redcurrants. Refreshing on the palate with vibrant crunchy black fruit acidity, it will go well with rich Italian food. Alc 11%



#### **Domaine Gilles Morat,** St-Véran, Burgundy, France 2014 17.5 (91)

£17.95 Stannary Wine Gilles Morat is based in Vergisson, in the heart of the Mâconnais, with 6ha of vines - mainly Pouilly-Fuissé and a small parcel of St-Véran. This organic Chardonnay is made artisanally and without oak to preserve freshness, resulting in zesty citrus fruit, bright acidity and flinty minerality. Alc 13%



#### Niepoort, Redoma **Branco**, **Douro**, **Portugal 2014** 17.5 (91)

£19 Tanners

This delicious Portuguese white is made from a field blend of old vines. Carefully selected grapes were handled gently throughout the vinification process, resulting in an elegant wine of delicate white flowers, lemon and orange notes, accompanied by a balanced firm acidity, and persistent length. Alc 12.5%



#### Arras, Grand Vintage, Tasmania, Australia 2006

17.75 (92)

£27.99 Liberty Wines

With 27 years of experience in fizz making, Ed Carr is a star winemaker who has again produced a brilliant result here. Sourced from coolclimate vineyards, this has a complex nose of white flowers and honev and a fresh apple palate with citrus acidity. The eight-year lees ageing brings incredible complexity with a creamy texture. Alc 12.5%

For full details of UK stockists, see p116



#### Adega dos Eidos, Eidos de Padriñán Albariño, Rías Baixas, Spain 2014 17 (90)

£11.95 Lea & Sandeman A brilliant Albariño from grapes grown on the granitic slopes of Val do Salnés, a sub-region of Rías Baixas. Generous, broadtextured, ripe stone fruit and green apple flavours along with fresh acidity, minerals and a gentle phenolic grip on the finish. Great depth. Alc 12.5%



#### **Kumeu River, Estate** Chardonnay, Kumeu, **New Zealand 2011** 17 (90)

£18.99 Booths 😷

A blend of grapes from six different sites, this is made by one of the country's best Chardonnay producers. It has lovely concentration with peach and honey characters. Ripe and rich with well-integrated fine oak and pristine acidity. Drinking well and will benefit from further ageing. Alc 14%



#### **Definition Chardonnay.** Limoux, Languedoc,

France 2014 16.5 (88)

£12.99 Majestic A smart Chardonnay from Limoux, in the Pyrenean foothills of southern France – a higher and cooler area than the other neighbouring ACs. Chosen by Majestic for its Definition range, it brims with toast, lemon and nuts, along with ripe stone fruits a plush texture and fresh acidity. Alc 13.5%



#### **Von Winning, Sauvignon** Blanc II, Pfalz, Germany **2014** 16.5 (88)

£16.95 Berry Bros & Rudd It's well worth trying this unusual Sauvignon Blanc from Pfalz, made by one of Germany's top producers. It has a slightly funky nose at first but it quickly opens up to green herbs, freshly cut grass, pear and lime fruits. The palate follows a similar theme, with stony minerality, punchy acidity and a fresh finish. Alc 12%



#### Domaine de la Ville de Colmar. Clos St-Jacques. Riesling, Alsace, France **2013** 17 (90)

£14.99 Majestic

Grapes for this wine come from 10.5ha of the Clos St-Jacques, a unique site protected from the wind by the surrounding hills. This is full of flavour: white peach, apple, lemon and mineral notes with herbal spice. Great texture, bright acidity and a long, complex finish. Alc 12.5%



#### Weingut Felsner, **Reisenthal Grüner** Veltliner, Kremstal, **Austria 2013** 17 (90)

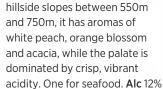
£15.43 Clark Foyster

With a 'less is more' philosophy, Manfred Felsner has coaxed great depth and character from this single vineyard on loess soil. From handpicked grapes, this wine has a savoury mineral character, beautiful purity and an expressive lime fruit palate. **Alc** 13%



#### Poier e Sandri. Palai Müller Thurgau, Trentino, **Italy 2014** 16.5 (88)

 $£16.50 \ \text{Fortyfive10}, \text{Handford}$ A partnership between Mario Pojer and Fiorentino Sandri, this is one of Trentino's best Müller Thurgaus. From grapes on hillside slopes between 550m





#### **Mother Rock, Force** Majeure Cinsault Rosé, **Swartland, South Africa 2015** 17.25 (91)

£18.49 Indigo Wine, Burgess & Hall, St Andrews Wine Co

From Johan Meyer, this is not your average rosé – in fact, it's more like a light red wine. From 40-year-old Cinsault picked early to keep its freshness, it's perfumed with ripe red cherry fruit, soft tannins and real finesse on the finish. Alc 12.5%



#### **Craven Wines, Clairette** Blanche, Stellenbosch, **South Africa 2014** 17.75 (92)

£18.49 Handford, Roberson, Chelsea Vintners, Philglas & Swiggot, Sommelier Wine Co, RS Wines

Clairette has a long history in the Cape, but it was ripped out in favour of more popular varieties; grapes for this are from one of the last plots in Stellenbosch. Half were fermented on skins for two weeks giving extra complexity, a velvet texture, green apple, lime and ginger hints. Alc 11%



#### AA Badenhorst, Ramnasgras Cinsault, Swartland, South Africa **2014** 18 (93)

£24.50 Swig

Made by the larger than life Adi Badenhorst, this is the first vintage from 58-year-old Cinsault vines. It's a serious, fine-boned style full of minerally raspberry and floral notes. Very delicate and moreish with subtle oak and fine tannins. Extremely limited, so don't miss it. Alc 12%



#### **Domaine Stéphane Tissot, Singulier** Trousseau, Arbois, Jura, France 2013 17.75 (92)

£27.50 Berry Bros & Rudd The biodynamic Domaine Tissot has been the driving force behind Jura's resurrection. From the local grape Trousseau, this delivers delicate red cherry fruit with some white pepper spice. It has a strong backbone with fine tannins and minerality on the finish. Alc 12%



#### Domaine de la Terre Rouge, Les Côtes de l'Ouest Syrah, California, **USA 2011** 17.5 (91)

£19.75-£21 Bottle Apostle, Butler's, Taurus Wine. The Secret Cellar From a selection of vineyards in the Sierra Foothills, this crowdpleasing Syrah is fresh and elegant, packed with pretty red fruit. Soft and round with silky tannins, it's not your typical Californian red, in a much lighter, more elegant style. Alc 14.5%



#### **Domaine Georges** Vernay, De Mirbaudie, **IGP Collines** Rhodaniennes, Rhône, France 2014 17.5 (91)

£15.50 Yapp Bros

Star Condrieu producer Vernay makes this juicy, delicious and great-value Syrah from mature vines planted just beyond the boundary of Côte-Rôtie. Lifted aromas of ripe black berries and pepper notes, smooth tannins and vanilla oak. Alc 12.5%



#### Château Mignan. Minervois, Languedoc, France 2013 17.25 (90+)

£10 Roberson

Château Mignan makes greatvalue reds from organic grapes grown on steep slopes of clay limestone soils in the heart of the Minervois AC. A blend of 73% Syrah and 23% Grenache, this robust, full-bodied wine expresses rustic charm with ripe black fruits and meaty, toasty notes. Alc 14%



#### Hatzidakis. Mavrotragano. Santorini, Greece 2011 17.25 (90+)

£24 The Wine Society The food-friendly Mavrotragano grape virtually disappeared from the island of Santorini until Hatzidakis brought it back to life. This has a distinctive nose of black fruit, herbs and coffee, while the palate is robust with raw tannins but nicely balanced by fresh acidity. Alc 14%



#### Kaiken, Terroir Series, Cabernet Sauvignon-Malbec-Petit Verdot, Mendoza, Argentina **2011** 17.25 (90+)

£9.99 Liberty Wines, Brook & Vine This 80% Cabernet-led blend has an intense nose of blackberry, cassis, chocolate, coffee, vanilla and violet, which is repeated on the rich palate. Nicely integrated French oak, fine tannins and a silky, creamy texture are lifted by bright acidity. Alc 14.5%



#### Andrea Oberto, Nebbiolo, Langhe, Piedmont, Italy 2013 17 (90)

£15.95 Lea & Sandeman From six-year-old vines that, with greater maturity, will be destined for more serious Barolo, this junior version shows all the concentration and cherry fruit expression of its big brother, but with softer tannins and a lighter texture. Moreish and food friendly. Alc 14%



#### **Domaine Zind-Humbrecht**, Zind, Alsace, France 2011

17.5 (91)

£17.99 Waitrose 😷



Run by one of the leading figures in biodynamics, Olivier Humbrecht MW, this estate needs little introduction. A blend of 60% Chardonnay and 40% Auxerrois, the Zind cuvée offers delicate, citrus fruit aromas and intense spice. A crowd-pleasing style with pristine acidity and a fine minerality, it is drinking well now but has potential to develop. Alc 12.5%



#### Domaine du Joncier, L'O de Joncier, Côtes du Rhône, France 2013 17 (90)





## Santenay, Burgundy, France 2013 17 (90)

£19.99 Waitrose 😷 This ninth-generation family estate is one of Santenay's most respected. From 17ha it produces delicate, pure wines and this cru - one of the AC's coolest sites - is no exception. Perfumed cedar oak, wild raspberry and silky tannins and a fresh breezy quality. Alc 13%



#### Khareba, Saperavi. Kakheti, Georgia 2013

16.5 (88)

£9.95 Tanners

Made from the native Georgian grape Saperavi by a modern producer in the premier region for the variety. It is slightly rustic in style, with intense blackberry, black cherry, meaty, smoky and liquorice characters. Refreshing acidity lifts the chewy, savoury texture, and firm yet dry tannins linger on the finish. Alc 13.5%



#### Sanchez Romate, Olvidado Amontillado, **Jerez, Spain NV** 17.5 (91)

£18.50 (375ml) The Wine Society Christmas wouldn't be the same without a glass of delicious Sherry, and this is a 20-year-old Amontillado that had been forgotten in the cellars. Toasted almond and candied orange aromas lead to a complex, dry and nutty palate with some fine oak and a sweet vanilla hint on the finish. Alc 20%



#### Domaine du Niagara, **Arnaud Despres, Fleurie, Beaujolais, France 2013** 17 (90)

£16 Domaine Direct

Despres, who inherited this domaine from his grandfather, also runs the famous Domaine de la Madone. This is textbook Gamay: perfumed raspberry and violet, and a palate that is denser and richer than your average Fleurie with a refreshing acidity. Very enjoyable. **Alc** 13%



#### **Domaine Rochette.** Côte de Py, Morgon, Beaujolais, France 2014 17 (90)

£13.95 Lea & Sandeman A fabulous cru Beaujolais from Morgon's top site, this beautiful Gamay has both depth and purity of intense black cherry and strawberry fruit plus fennel seed spice on the nose and palate. Fresh acidity and gentle, grainy tannins give balance to



#### Willi Haag, **Brauneberger Juffer-Sonnenuhr Riesling** Auslese, Mosel, **Germany 2011** 17.5 (91)

the long finish. Alc 13%

£13.99 Waitrose 😍

A family business with Markus, Willi's grandson, now running the show. Here, inviting aromas of honey carry through on to the rich and intense palate. With 108g of residual sugar it is sweet, but is balanced by great acidity and a mineral finish. Alc 8.66%



#### **Taylor's, Late Bottled** Vintage Port, Douro, Portugal 2010 17 (90)

£15 Asda, Booths, Sainsbury's, Tesco, Morrison's, Waitrose From one of the best-known Port houses, this LBV is rich and robust with black berry and prune characters plus sweet spices from about five years in oak. It's ready to be drunk now and does not need decanting, and will keep fresh for up to four

weeks after opening. Alc 20%



#### **Broc, Vine Starr** Zinfandel, Sonoma County, California, USA 2013 18.5 (95)

£25 The Wine Society

Zinfandel has never been a favourite of mine, but this is not your average Zin – quite the opposite, in fact. It's an elegant, delicate, perfumed style

with notes of red cherry, pepper and violet: pure, refined and showing wonderful freshness. It's a must-try for anyone snubbing this variety and just look at the alcohol! Alc 12.5%



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**French** 

## Chez Bruce, London

A LONG-STANDING CLICHE used to be that you judged Chinese or Indian restaurants by the amount of Chinese or Indian people eating in them, which ignored a number of markers, including the possibility that the chef and/or owners may simply have had a large family.

A better indicator is where chefs eat, and a staple every year in such lists is Chez Bruce – an honest and moderately sophisticated brasserie, and long-time holder of a Michelin star. For this, my last regular restaurant column for *Decanter*, my 2006 Restaurant of the Year seemed an appropriate venue for a curtain call.

The place has form, of course: Marco Pierre White and Gordon Ramsay launched from here when it was Harvey's, and Bruce Poole, who took over, was originally part of the legendary brigade at Bibendum that included Simon Hopkinson and half a dozen other of the UK's best chefs. Poole was also a serious wine lover, and encouraged his sommeliers, who soared. (So did the neighbourhood: what was once a two-block stretch of rundown shops fronting Wandsworth Common is now a smart row of eight restaurants, an art gallery and a few clothing retailers I can't afford.)

The ambience is as straightforward as the cooking, light and cheery, heightened by an impressive collection of attractive modern paintings and amiable staff. A glance at the menu leaves no doubt as to where the kitchen's coming from: duck leg ragout, chicken ballotine, fillet of plaice with mussels and onions in cider, sea bream with fennel choucroute—all promise ample flavours deeply rooted in the sunny side of memory. On my visit, the venison loin with spiced carrot and sauce poivrade, and a plump and tender confit rabbit leg with coco-bean stew, ham and garlic croutons were deliciously evocative. On another visit, côte de boeuf with béarnaise sauce and hand-cut chips, partnered with a hearty Domaine Raspail-Ay from Gigondas was robustly affirmative fare for a grey day. 'There'll always be a good market for French-based cooking, because it's so bloody good,' Poole once remarked, and the point is still emphatically made here.

The wine list has the same sort of depth, but more breadth. France is ahead by a nose, with Italy close behind, and Australia very









much in the running, but most of the rest of the wine world is represented as well. Two dozen by the glass include a Bodegas Acustic Montsant blend and 2009 Peter Lehmann Semillon, as well as a Coravin fine-wine rotation. Some 36 half-bottles include Ridge, Gaja and several serious bargains, and there are genuinely mature wines from everywhere, at reasonable prices. The wine list is 38 pages long, a road map to pleasure, well worth a good perusal. Download it from the restaurant website in advance and enjoy the ride.

2 Bellevue Road, London SW17 7EG Tel: +44 (0)20 8672 0114; www.chezbruce.co.uk Open for lunch and dinner daily





CHAMPAGNE



## Antidote, London

#### Decanter

WINE LIST RATING

★★★ for range

★★★ for value THE NAME IS apt. This cosy wine bar-plus-restaurant will make you feel better. Formerly La Trouvaille, now with a face-lift, new wine list and a menu upgrade by consulting chef Mikael Jonsson, creator of Hedone in Chiswick, it's leaped forward to ultra-modernity. This is what we have to call

'new cooking', but with flair. Seaweed, chickweed, nasturtiums, sorrel, lovage, sea aster and odd vegetables enrich complex sauces and stocks enveloping various fish, poultry and meat in surprising, satisfying ways. It's deconstructed rather than reimagined.

The wine list is nearly 200 bins of organic and biodynamc wines. We asked for something 'not too wild', and were rewarded with glasses of Domaine de Bellevue's Granit Muscadet 2014; Domaine de Veilloux's Les Veilleurs, Cheverny 2011; Domaine du Coulet's Cornas 2013 and Domaine Ledogar's Le Blanc, Corbières 2011 – all clean, sound – and delicious – revelations.

12A Newburgh St, London W1F 7RR Tel: +44 (0)20 7287 8488; www.antidotewinebar.com Open Monday-Saturday lunch and dinner



#### **READER OFFER**

#### The French

In 2013, Simon Rogan launched The French at The Midland Hotel in Manchester, where he offers his signature use of British-only ingredients. Working in conjunction with head chef Adam Reid, he focuses on local produce from the northwest of England, much of which is sourced from his own farm near Cartmel in Cumbria.

Rogan has brought The French to the forefront of the Manchester dining scene with his seasonal and inventive dishes, winning a host of culinary accolades including the 2013 *Decanter*/Laurent-Perrier Restaurant of the Year.



On Wednesday to Friday lunchtimes (12pm-1.30pm) from 1-18 December 2015, *Decanter* 

readers can enjoy The French's six-course menu, including a glass of Laurent-Perrier Rosé, for £65 per person. Booking is essential and subject to availability. Please quote *Decanter* when booking.

The Midland Hotel, Peter St, Manchester M60 2DS E: info@the-french.co.uk T: +44 (0)161 932 4198







#### At your service: Elyse Lambert MS



Graziella, 116 Rue McGill, Montréal, Québec City, Canada H2Y 2E5 Tel: +1 (514) 876 0116 www. restaurantgraziella.ca

Lambert became a Master Sommelier and Best Sommelier of Canada in 2015; in 2006 she was named Best Sommelier of the Americas

If I was dining at your restaurant, what is the one dish I should order? Which wine/s would you recommend with it and why? Mushrooms offer an array of flavours for the wine lover. Graziella Battista, our chef, prepares ricotta and grana padano gnocchi served with a vine cherry tomato and wild mushroom ragout. The gnocchi are soft and creamy and the mushrooms earthy, while the tomatoes bring perfect acidity and sweetness. It's a plate of pure pleasure and comfort, perfect as the evenings are getting colder.

My wine suggestion to accompany the gnocchi is Fontodi's Chianti Classico 2012. This family-owned estate in the heart of Chianti has a 70ha vineyard that is certified organic. The 100% Sangiovese is elegant and precise, offering notes of forest floor and cherry stones, wrapped up in ripe and silky tannins. Sangiovese, and particularly Chianti, is the ideal wine pairing for tomato and mushroom dishes.

In terms of famous wine terroirs, my current favourite is Mt Etna in Sicily, and another wine that would work beautifully with our gnocchi is Tenuta delle Terre Nere's Santo Spirito 2012. This famous Sicilian producer's Nerello Mascalese – from a beautiful vineyard on the northern slopes of the volcano – is intense, complex, pure and balanced, with enough personality to accompany the dish without overpowering it.

# Alsace: wine and food lover's guide

From choucroute and flammekueche to Gewurztraminer and Riesling, Alsace has some of the most distinctive dishes and wines in France. Sue Style picks out best restaurants to visit

ALSACE IS ONE of those reassuring places where you are unlikely ever to go hungry or thirsty. The very name is synonymous with foie gras, choucroute, pork pies in flaky pastry, wine-rich game stews, fruit tarts, ice cream studded with kirsch-soaked raisins, elegant Riesling and the powerful eau-de-vie Marc de Gewurztraminer.

This is a region with a deeply rooted, centuries-old culture of food and wine, with echoes of both its French and Germanic heritage. The snag about deep roots and ancient cultures is that things can get stuck in a straitjacket. But thanks to its location on a major north-south axis and its shared – and shifting – borders, Alsace has always been exposed to external influences and open to new ideas.

Alongside reliably good classic cooking and well-made wines, there's constant renewal on the restaurant front, and major developments in the vineyards. Wine critic James Suckling describes Alsace today as 'France's most exciting wine region', noting its astonishing diversity of wines from an array of grape types, soils, microclimates and producers.

#### Famous names

This year's hot ticket is the Villa René Lalique (www.villarenelalique.com; see also box p123) north of Strasbourg in Wingen-sur-Moder. The new restaurant is a luminous glass pavilion designed by star architect Mario Botta, juxtaposed with René Lalique's 1920s timbered and gabled family home that was recently restored by Silvio Denz, entrepreneur, vineyard owner and the CEO of Lalique.

E It's a glittering showcase not only for Lalique crystal and glassware but also for some jaw-dropping kitchen fireworks by chef

Jean-Georges Klein, lured here by Denz from the (then) three-starred L'Arnsbourg in Baerenthal. The tasting menu is a magical succession of tiny surprises that combine and contrast crunchy with silky-smooth, spicy with sweet-sour, piping hot with ice cold.

The wine list is a hefty bible that dovetails Denz's own formidable cellar (big on Bordeaux and the US) with award-winning sommelier Romain Iltis' handpicked Alsace selection. Rieslings are writ large, from headlinegrabbing new wines from old-established names (Trimbach's Grand Cru Geisberg, Hugel's Grossi Laüe) to grand crus from relative newcomers Paul Ginglinger and Henry Fuchs. A revelation for those unwilling to believe in Alsace's potential for decent red wine is the page devoted to Pinot Noir, where Iltis ventures beyond the territory once monopolised by Albert Mann, Muré and Zusslin to reveal budding Pinot craftsmen such as Jean-Paul Schmitt and Schoenheitz.

Heading south to Marlenheim, at the top end of the Route des Vins, Le Cerf (www.lecerf. com) ticks all the Alsace boxes with its timbers, geraniums, wood panelling and Spindler marquetry. Yet this family affair, founded by chef Michel Husser's great-grandfather, is constantly renewing itself. It's reasonable to expect choucroute in a country inn, but Husser's version, surmounted with bite-sized chunks of crackly-crusted, melt-in-mouth suckling pig and seared foie gras, is a contemporary triumph. A civet of local venison is par for the course too in game-rich Alsace, but the chef slips in a crisp samosa of morello cherries as accompaniment. Even that Alsace classic, vacherin glacé, gets a makeover, with a gossamer layer of meringue enclosing multicoloured sorbet nuggets.





Above: the modern dining room at Les Haras, which was once the stables of Strasbourg's national stud in the 18th century



The wine list has a special place in its heart for top drops from the Bas-Rhin, including from Domaine Pfister, Mochel and Anne-Marie Schmitt.

The fact that Marc Haeberlin of the legendary Auberge de l'Ill is the consultant chef for Strasbourg's **Les Haras** (www.les-haras-brasserie.com; see also box p123) is apt to set pulses racing and raise expectations which, when it comes to the food, are not always met.

The point here is the place, not what's on your plate. You climb up the swirling spiral staircase to the first floor where, suspended beneath the rafters of what were once the stables of the national stud, designer Patrick Jouin has conjured an award-winning contemporary dining space. There's a buzz of happy, shiny people tucking into French brasserie fare of the sweetbreads/magret de canard school, with occasional Asian and Latin American intrusions, washed down with Meteor draft beer and wines from all the usual suspects (Hugel, Josmeyer, Zind-Humbrecht).

#### Local flavour

Back on the Route des Vins at **Au Potin** (www. aupotin.com) in Barr, owner and antiques collector Hervé Duhamel has created a Parisian-style Alsatian bistro complete with mirrors, brass hatstands and copies of today's Dernières Nouvelles d'Alsace hanging from wooden newspaper holders.

From the kitchen comes a pleasing mix of old-school favourites (tarte flambée, choucroute, foie gras) and daily-changing specials (fresh pasta, juicy low- and slow-cooked meat), plus creative all-vegetable main dishes – a rarity in carnivorous Alsace. Open wines come from Duhamel's winegrowing friends and neighbours, including André Ostertag, Lucas Rieffel and Patrick Meyer.

A side-step up into the Vosges takes you to Hotel-Restaurant La Cheneaudière (www. cheneaudière.com; see also box p123) in Colroyla-Roche. Chef Roger Bouhassoun is one of a dying breed who sources everything possible from within about a 20km radius of his ➤

'There's
constant
renewal
on the
restaurant
front, and
major
developments
in the
vineyards'





kitchen. He also butchers, fillets, cooks or preserves it all from scratch, simply because he can't conceive of doing things any other way. The result is food with attitude and a real sense of place (soft-boiled eggs with Vosges chanterelles and home-cured ham, local snails bathed in a herby foam, slow-cooked pigeon breast with the legs parcelled in crisp pastry).

Sommelier Rodrigue Palvadeau is brimming with good suggestions on what to choose from his extensive list and is well attuned to what's new in Alsace, including a seductive Pinot Noir from Vignoble des Deux Lunes.

Down in the vineyards in the ravishing village of Bergheim (as good as Riquewihr but with fewer tourist buses) is **Wistub du Sommelier** (www.wistub-du-sommelier.com), a classic wine bar/bistro that's a haunt of local

Above left: Villa René Lalique juxtoposes the famous glass designer's restored 1920s home and a modern restaurant

Above right: the Alsatian wine list and traditional dishes make Wistub du Sommelier in Bergheim a favourite with winemakers vignerons and a favourite with visitors in search of *l'Alsace authentique*. Owned by Patrick and Antje Schneider, it's the place to tuck into home-made foie gras or *presskopf* (brawn) followed by ox cheeks braised in Pinot Noir and an iced soufflé laced with Marc de Gewurztraminer. Antje's list is an Alsace anthology, ranging from near-neighbours Deiss, Lorentz and Sylvie Spielmann to others she would like you to discover such as Beck-Hartweg, Gérard Neumeyer and Clément Klur.

#### Hidden gems

At L'Atelier du Peintre (www.atelier-peintre.fr) in Colmar's stunning town centre, Michelinstarred Loïc Lefebvre is one of France's young chefs who has the perfect riposte to anyone who claims French food is passé.

#### Alsace cuisine

**Asparagus**: white is king in spring in Alsace, typically boiled and served with ham, vinaigrette and hollandaise.

**Baeckeoffe**: pork, lamb, beef and vegetables marinated for several days in Riesling and baked for hours in the typical decorated ceramic casserole.

Choucroute: the raw material (shredded, salted white cabbage, preserved in the autumn) has given its name to the classic Alsace dish. Traditionally a choucroute comes garnished with smoked pork, ham and sausages but there are some great modern interpretations, from choucroute with fish (salmon, monkfish, pike-perch) to chef Michel Husser's succulent version featuring suckling pig and seared foie gras (see main text on Le Cerf, p120).

**Coq au Riesling**: chicken – or better still, a cockerel – simmered in Riesling with added mushrooms and cream,



traditionally served with finely cut, home-made noodles.

Flammekueche/Tarte flambée: Alsace's answer to pizza: wafer-thin bread dough baked with onion, crème fraîche and bacon and served on a wooden board. Restaurants often serve mini versions as an amuse-bouche. Updated versions are also found, notably at Flamme & Co (www.flammeandco.fr) chef Olivier Nasti's über-trendy restaurants in Strasbourg and Kaysersberg, where toppings range from Iberico ham with fruit chutney to crème brûlée.

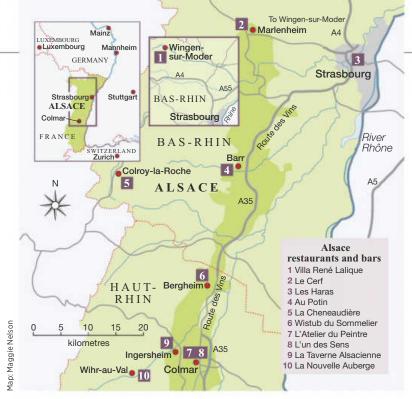
**Foie gras**: made from both duck and goose liver, can be either mi-cuit (lightly cooked) and served chilled in slabs or quenelle-like ovals, or pan-fried and served warm with chutney.

**Kugelhopf**: a turban-shaped yeast loaf studded with raisins and almonds, typically served with Crémant d'Alsace. Kugelhopf glacé is a parfait, studded with dried fruit and frozen in a mould.

**Munster:** soft, brine-washed cows' milk cheese from the Vosges. From the same family as Epoisses – deliciously pungent.

**Tarte à l'oignon**: a creamy quiche of gently stewed onions, eggs, cream and sometimes bacon.

**Tarte aux fruits:** sweet tarts made with apples, cherries, quetsch (purple plums) or mirabelle (yellow plums), depending on the season. Some are baked simply with sugar and dots of butter, others are enriched with a cream and egg custard.



Come here for handsome, contemporary, intensely flavoured food based on local seasonal ingredients served at eye-rubbing prices (the midweek lunch menu is a snip). Lefebvre's partner Caroline gives a warm welcome and their sommelier is a fund of vinous knowledge.

A two-minute walk away is L'Un des Sens (www.cave-lun-des-sens.fr), a wine bar and shop whose sommelier-owner is an evangelist for quirky, leftfield wines – chiefly organic, biodynamic and/or natural, mainly French with a strong showing from Alsace. Explain your interests and tastes, a bottle will be offered for sampling (at any given moment there may be 20 whites and 20 reds open, always fresh thanks to a brisk turnover) and if not to your liking, an alternative is proposed.

There's no kitchen but they serve top-notch charcuterie, cheeses from fromager Jacky Quesnot and excellent bread from Au Pain de Mon Grand-Père.



Above: Chef Bernard Leray from La Nouvelle Auberge in Wihr-au-Val

Sue Style is a freelance wine, food and travel writer based in Alsace

#### La Taverne Alsacienne (www.

tavernealsacienne-familleguggenbuhl.com) in Ingersheim is owned and run by the formidable Guggenbuhl family. It is a favourite of local winegrowers and the venue for celebrated wine-pairing dinners hosted by Decanter World Wine Awards Alsace Regional Chair Thierry Meyer. Chef Jean-Philippe Guggenbuhl is famous for his skilled fish cookery (throughout the year shoals of monkfish, brill, skrei, pike-perch, lobster and crabs land in his kitchen), his brimming mushroom basket (days off are spent foraging in the Vosges), his wine list (drawing on top domaines from Alsace to Burgundy, Rhône to Bordeaux) and his winning lunch menu, outstanding value for money.

La Nouvelle Auberge (www.nauberge.com) in Wihr-au-Val on the main road from Colmar to the Munster Valley is not just any old roadside inn. Breton-born chef Bernard Leray is in the kitchen and his wife Martine is out front (or down in her wine cellar).

The ground-floor bistro is packed with locals who come for their lunchtime fix of home-made terrines, steaming plates of choucroute or bread-and-butter pudding (made from kugelhopf) with wild bilberries and ice cream. Upstairs in the Michelinstarred restaurant there are hints of both the chef's Breton heritage and his adoptive Alsatian identity: a brilliant green snail fricassée, sweetly dressed crab with fine shreds of pickled turnips, chunky ceps from the Vosges with a foaming sabayon or sweetbreads with a mini spring onion tart.

The all-French wine list leans heavily (but not exclusively) towards Alsace, notably the fine Domaine Schoenheitz, whose vineyards rise up above the village and with whom they stage superb wine-pairing dinners.

#### Where to stay

#### La Villa Lalique, Wingen-sur-Moder

Swiss entrepreneur, vineyard owner and wine collector Silvio Denz has turned René Lalique's 1920s-built family home into a boutique hotel with six luxurious suites designed by Tina Green and incorporating Lalique's original motifs, a fabulous restaurant and a helipad in the garden for airborne guests.

#### Les Haras, Strasbourg

An elegant quadrangle of buildings that formerly housed a national stud farm, now with a research centre, brasserie and four-star hotel with 38 stylish rooms.

#### Hostellerie La Cheneaudière, Colroy-la-Roche

A warmly welcoming, family-owned Relais & Châteaux tucked away in a tiny village in the Vosges. Start the day with the sumptuous breakfast buffet, then explore the surrounding countryside on an electric booster bike and end up in the stupendous spa before dinner.

#### **B Espace Suites, Riquewihr**

Local restaurateur Jean-Luc Brendel has hidden a handful of funky, super-modern suites inside the shell of a classic-style, 17th-century timbered house on Riquewihr's main street, located almost opposite Hugel. www.jlbrendel.com

#### Le Quatorze, Colmar

This four-star boutique hotel (a former 19th-century pharmacy) in Colmar's atmospheric old town is the brainchild of an interior designer/architect couple, and boasts 13 minimalist-chic rooms. www.hotelguatorze.com

#### Domaine de Beaupré, Guebwiller

A 19th-century mansion on the edge of this pretty town at the foot of the Vosges. Once the home of a local industrialist, it is now a stylish B&B with polished parquet floors, antique furniture and canopied beds, with lush breakfasts and live jazz on Tuesday nights. www.domainedebeaupre.com

# Notes&Queries

Each month our experts answer readers' wine queries and share their knowledge

Email: ask@decanter.com. Post: The Editor, Decanter, Blue Fin Building, 110 Southwark Street, London SE1 OSU, UK

## This month's experts



**Fiona Beckett** is a *Decanter* contributing editor and publishes *matching* foodandwine.com



Charles Curtis MW is a wine consultant and former head of wine for Christie's in Asia and the Americas



**Christelle Guibert**is *Decanter*'s tasting's director

#### Mulled wine

This may be anathema to *Decanter*'s experts, but I'm looking for the ultimate recipe for mulled wine. Can you help?

Jenny Young, Newcastle

Fiona Beckett replies: So long as you're not mulling one of the finest bottles in your cellar (which I'm sure you're not), it's not anathema at all. That said I'm not sure there's an 'ultimate' recipe – it's a question of personal taste. I personally think you need to add something sweet like a good slug of vintage character or late bottled vintage Port, or a dash of Grand Marnier or Cointreau. I also try to keep most of my spices whole, otherwise the mulled wine can taste powdery – so use cinnamon sticks rather than ground cinnamon, for example.

The two key things are to use a drinkable if inexpensive wine for a base (something like an own-label Corbières is ideal) and not to boil the liquid at any point, otherwise you'll burn off the alcohol and make your mulled wine taste bitter.

This is my recipe, to serve 8-10: 2 bottles medium-bodied red wine; 1 unwaxed orange studded with 6 cloves; a few strips of zest from an unwaxed lemon; 2 cinnamon sticks; 6 cardamom pods, lightly crushed; a little freshly grated nutmeg; 100g soft brown sugar; 100ml orange liqueur and a few orange slices.

Pour the wine into a large saucepan and add 500ml cold water. Add the orange and lemon zest, spices and sugar and heat gently until almost boiling. Reduce the heat as low as possible – the liquid should barely tremble – and simmer for about 30 minutes so the spices infuse. Add the orange liqueur and orange slices and reheat without boiling. Ladle into small cups or glasses to serve.

#### Dumb or dead?

How do you distinguish between a wine that is merely going through a dumb phase in its development and one that is over the hill? Spencer, via email

Charles Curtis MW replies: It is definitely possible to tell the difference between the two. Normally, one would say that a 'dumb' wine is not expressive – that is it has markedly less aroma, flavour and/or structure than one



Above: keep your spices whole when you make mulled wine to avoid it tasting powdery

would expect. Typically these wines will eventually open to reveal their secrets, but it will be necessary to wait. In my experience nothing will revive their spirits immediately: neither double decanting nor any other type of aeration nor any mechanical device will do the trick. Time is the only remedy.

Conversely, a wine that is 'over the hill' definitely has aromas, flavours and structure, but we're not so sure we like what is being expressed. These wines are most often marked by oxidation: first the fruit falls off, then the wine begins to have a meaty or savoury character; then this savoury aspect will intensify and the wine can show notes of strong umami aromas that some tasters describe as beef bouillon or mushroom or, more kindly, sous bois'. Sensitivity to this varies: some tasters dislike this register of aromas strongly, while those who often enjoy mature wines can be much more forgiving.

The meaty or beefy register is remarkably similar for reds and for whites, but with white wines the change is more marked because the colour darkens significantly. Here one often speaks of maderisation.

## Grape varieties

with Julia Harding MW

#### Cinsaut/Cinsault



Although Cinsaut is the 25th most planted variety, in its home of southern France it rarely takes centre stage; for both reds and rosés it is generally blended with Grenache and/or Syrah and/or Carignan. According to Kym Anderson's Which Winegrape Varieties are Grown Where, in 2010 there were more than 36,000ha planted around the

world. However underrated it may be in France, it has always been important in South Africa - if only as a high-yielding workaday variety; indeed, it was the most planted darkskinned variety until Cabernet Sauvignon took over in 1993. There are still more than 2,000ha in South Africa and in some regions, notably Swartland, the gnarly old bushvines are treated with increased respect - a turnaround also seen in Chile's Itata Valley (see p110). Wines are usually light in colour and tannins but fruity and aromatic, with great longevity. (Its other claim to fame in South Africa is as a parent, along with Pinot Noir, of Pinotage.) In France, try Domaines des Terres Falmet and D'Aupilhac; in the Cape, Alheit, Badenhorst, Natte Valleij, Rall and Waterkloof; and in Chile, De Martino. Wine Grapes by Jancis Robinson MW, Julia Harding MW and José Vouillamoz; www.winegrapes.org

#### Corkscrew for Christmas

I have lots of wines in my collection and want the best corkscrew to deal with natural and diam corks, as well as older bottles where the cork sometimes breaks. Can you advise me on what I might put on my Christmas list? David McCormack, Brisbane, Australia

Christelle Guibert replies: For me, Laguiole is the ultimate corkscrew. Not only does the screw work well on both natural and diam corks, but they look amazing too. They are not cheap but have a lifetime warranty – so long as you get a real Laguiole, which is the key, as there are many fakes out there. The best ones are made by Guy Vialis (www.laguiole-imports.com/ collections/chateau-laguiole-corkscrews)

Imitation Laguiole corkscrews may look ➤

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## Notes & Queries

exactly like the real Château Laguiole models, even with the logo, but a low price will tell you it is a fake - expect to pay upwards of £60 for a real one. The weight is also a giveaway: authentic Laguiole corkscrews can weigh up to 125g - they have solid stainless-steel bolsters and thick body plates. Finally, the foil cutter blade will be stamped with 'Made in France' if it is the real deal.

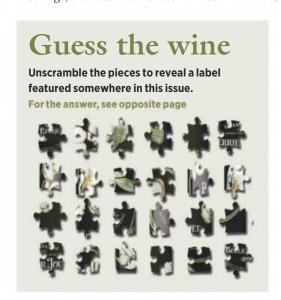
#### Decanting white wine

Which styles / ages of white wine would benefit from being decanted, and would you decant them for a shorter time than reds? Barbara Lorenzo, London

Steven Spurrier, Decanter's consultant editor, **replies:** There are three reasons for decanting: to allow the wine to breathe; to separate it from any deposit; and because a decanted wine enhances the anticipation of pleasure.

White wines seldom throw a deposit, except sometimes tartaric crystals, and because they don't have tannins the need for aeration is rarely necessary. So while the main reason is aesthetic, decanting should please the palate as much as the eye. One problem is that white wines need ice buckets more than they do decanters, so it is mostly older whites that are decanted, where the cold temperature is less important, even for mature sweet wines which will be showing layered complexity.

The Bordelais often decant their dry whites as well as their reds; the Bugundians never decant; Hugh Johnson decants old Riesling; and a restaurant I knew in Paris always served Champagne en carafe. I would decant young and old white Rhônes and mature Alsace Rieslings, and both at the last minute.



## Tasting notes decoded



Pierre Amadieu, Domaine Grand Romane 2013

18.5 (95) \$F 18.5 JLL 18.75 MOW 18.5

E19.95-£24 Ac Callie, Champagnes & Chiteaux, Love Wine

This lonely, high, almost abstract vineyard represents the dream and foresight of Pierre Amadieu, who planted vines and olives, and grazed sheep here for the benefit of their droppings in the early 1950s. 65% 
Grenache (planted in 1950) and 20% Mourvedre (1985, some 1952) 
provide a wonderful platform. The Mourvedre undergoes carbonic 
maceration, and a mix of new oak casks and large old 30hl barrels give 
a wine that's clean, long and grounded, gaining local imprint as it ages.

SF Pleasing nose of wood smokes loves, cassis and incense. The plate 
has an unexpected difference of sweetness that works well with the 
relatively austere, spicy finish. Very complete and very agreeable.

## Smoke/smoky

Smoky notes generally come from oak. Normally the intensity of smoky aromas and flavours in a wine will be determined by the toast of the oak (how charred it was), how many times the barrel has been used and how long the wine spends in the barrel. If the wine is put into a new barrel that has had a heavy toast then the

likelihood of having smoky notes will increase. This can be desirable if the wine has the structure to handle the oak. Sometimes heavy toasting and too many new barrels can lead to an overtly smoky wine, which may integrate with time, but can be difficult to assess when the wine is young. Smoke taint can also happen, when forest fires occur between veraison (when the grapes ripen) and harvest time. This has been a problem for winemakers in Canada's Okanagan Valley, California and throughout Australia. (Tasting note from p85)

#### Georgia on my mind

I've heard a lot about the wines of Georgia. To what extent is it geared up for wine tourism? Theo via email

Carla Capalbo, author of Tasting Georgia (published 2016) replies: Vines have been in Georgia for at least 8,000 years, and today's generation of winemakers are thrilled to be sharing their wines and food culture with new visitors. Wine tourism is increasing all the time, as is the infrastructure to facilitate foreign travellers. There are hotels across the country (which has the same total area as Scotland, much of which is high mountains).

The language is a hurdle as it is not linked to any other and has its own unique alphabet, but in Tbilisi English is widely spoken and there are wonderful sites and restaurants to visit. It's a lovely city to walk around and the country is incredibly safe for travellers.

For visiting the wineries, especially those where the traditional clay vessels, or qvevri, are still being used, the best (and most economical) way is to hire a driver and guide. You really need a 4x4 vehicle, and it's cheaper to get one with a driver than to rent your own. You can also get a tour planned for you by travel companies such as Living Roots (www. travellivingroots.com), which is run by John Wurdeman, winemaker at Pheasant's Tears.

Georgia is a welcoming, exciting place to visit and if you go now you'll still be among the pioneers!

Confused by a label? Unsure how to serve a wine? Ask Decanter...

Our expert team of contributors are here to advise on any aspect of wine. Each month we will print the most interesting queries with a personal reply from a relevant expert. Simply email ask@decanter.com with your question the more specific, the better - in no more than a single paragraph, and you could see your query, and a reply, in print. Please note we can only respond to those queries selected for publication.

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# Decanter

On sale 6 January

# Burgundy 2014 Best reds & whites

Gerard Basset MW and Stephen Brook pick their top wines of the new vintage

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**Californian Cabernet 2012** 

#### PLUS....

- Interview: Latour's Frédéric Engerer
  - California's Spring Mountain
  - Get to know the new Pinotage



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Guess the wine (see opposite page) Perrier-Jouët, Belle Epoque, Champagne





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# Marketwatch

Compiled by Richard Woodard

## All I want for Christmas is...

We asked some of the wine investment world's leading players what they'd like to give and receive this Christmas. Unsurprisingly, blue-chip Burgundy and Bordeaux were popular choices

lists, make Christmas wishes and assess just who has been naughty and nice during 2015. So we asked key personalities on the fine wine collecting and auction scene for their thoughts on three key festive questions... Which wines or categories deserve rewarding this year? 'The Burgundies of Domaine du Comte Liger-Belair (see p9). Louis-Michel is a great winemaker and his wines are incredible. The increasing prices being paid for them show that collectors and the market recognise that.' John Kapon, chairman of Acker Merrall

IT'S THAT TIME of the year

again - the time to draw up

'Mouton-Rothschild. Prices went more or less sideways in 2015. An exception was Mouton 1986: a year ago, it was trading here at auction at about CHF480 – now it is selling at about CHF600 (£393).' Marc Fischer of Steinfels, Zurich

'Japanese whisky. Our Hong Kong office has sold these unique old bottles with great success, and prices to match. The bottles and labels are gorgeous – they'd make a great gift.' Jeff Zacharia, president of Zachys

Who should be on Santa's naughty list in 2015?
'I can't blame a higher power,



but if whoever is responsible for hail having pummelled Burgundy too many times in the past few years could stop that, effective with the 2016 harvest, I and many other Burgundy lovers would appreciate it, so there's more of it to drink.' *John Kapon* 

'Crooked wine funds! I don't believe in pure wine investment funds. Recent years have seen so many of these collapse after just a few months of existence.' Arthur de Lencquesaing, international development director, iDealwine

'US interstate shipping regulations, which restrict a free and open market. It's Above: who wouldn't want a pallet of mixed wines from DRC for Christmas?

Below: James Miles of Liv-ex



simple to fix this by providing businesses with a way to collect and pay sales tax in each state. Secondly, the system, method and timing of offering Bordeaux en primeur. We need to open Bordeaux to much a wider market, rather than selling to a few investors at minimal margins.' Jamie Ritchie, CEO and president, Asia and Americas at Sotheby's Wine

What would you most like to receive as a gift this Christmas? 'A mixed pallet of Domaine de la Romanée-Conti from 1985, 1990, 1996, 1999, 2002, 2005, 2009 and 2010. Prices for La Tâche and Romanée-Conti are down 30% to 40% from their height, while Echézeaux through Romanée-St-Vivant are still seeing strong demand.' Jamie Ritchie

'After four years of falling prices, Bordeaux now looks to offer value. Many wines from recent vintages like 2010 are available at significant discounts to their en primeur release prices, and are showing tentative signs of recovery. There seems to be little downside to buying Bordeaux at the moment.' James Miles, MD of Liv-ex

'I'd like young Bordeaux first growths, in their original ➤

#### Comte Liger-Belair, La Romanée 2005

The big-value leap for this wine came in summer 2013; prior to that, it had traded at £10,000/case, before surging to £33,000/case and holding steady since.

## Mouton Rothschild 1986

Just over a year ago, this was changing hands for about £5,750 a case – now it's over £7,000. But that's still well short of the wine's high point in June 2011.

#### DRC, La Tâche 2009

Some signs of recovery here, but it remains 22% down on its high of June 2012 (about £30,000/ case), and 4.5% down on a two-year measure.

# Haut-Brion 2010 Recent Haut-Brion vintages have had the highest average Parker score of any first growth, but prices remain low: still 30% below release price and only just up on a six-month measure.

wooden cases. Why? I'm in no rush, these wines are long-lived and excellent, and they'll do well at auction, as long as you give them time.' Jeff Zacharia

#### London

European bidders came to the fore at Sotheby's London sale in October, with the auction making £769,437 (US\$1.2m). Stephen Mould, European head of Sotheby's Wine Department, reported 'solid bidding' on desirable vintages of Bordeaux and Burgundy (see box right).

#### **New York**

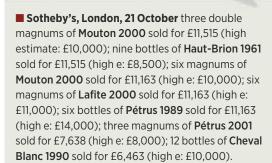
Sotheby's October sale of Château Margaux direct from the cellar fetched US\$2.8m,

double its high estimate, with every lot sold and 99% of them exceeding their high estimates. Highlights included a balthazar of Margaux 2009 selling for \$98,000, double its estimate, and a bottle of the 1900 vintage fetching \$61,250, six times its low estimate.

### **Hong Kong**

More than 110 world records were claimed, more than 90 of them for Burgundy, which accounted for the top five auction lots at Acker Merrall's 7 November sale in Hong Kong (see box, right). Asian buyers dominated, with more than 50% from Hong Kong and a growing number from the growth markets of Shanghai, Taipei and Tokyo. US buyers fell to a below-average share of 10%.

#### Hammer highlights



■ Hart Davis Hart, Chicago, 30-31 October six magnums of **Le Pin 1982** sold for \$101,575 (high e: \$75,000); 12 bottles of **Lafite 1982** sold for \$28,680 (high e: \$30,000); six bottles of Lafleur 1982 sold for \$28,680 (high e: \$28,000); 12 bottles of **Pétrus** 1989 sold for \$38,240 (high e: \$42,000); 12 bottles of assorted La Mission Haut-Brion sold for \$23,900 (high e: \$18,000); 12 bottles of Léoville-Las-Cases **1986** sold for \$7,170 (high e: \$4,800); six magnums of Ausone 2005 sold for \$13,145 (high e: \$9,500).

■ Acker Merrall, Hong Kong, 7 November two bottles of La Mission Haut-Brion 1961 sold for HK\$64,220 (high e: HK\$48,000); 12 bottles of Mouton 1986 sold for HK\$83,980 (high e: HK\$80,000); one magnum of Heitz Cellars' Martha's Vineyard 1974 sold for HK\$44,460 (high e: HK\$40,000); 12 bottles of Henri Jayer's Cros Parantoux, Vosne-Romanée 2000 sold for HK\$543,400 (high e: HK\$520,000); six bottles of Rousseau's Clos de Bèze, Chambertin 2002 sold for HK\$74,100 (high e: HK\$64,000); two bottles of Domaine de la Romanée-Conti's La Tâche 1942 sold for HK\$93,860 (high e: HK\$96,000); one 15-litre bottle of Masseto 2008 sold for HK\$197,600 (high e: HK\$280,000).

#### In brief

#### **HDH record Bordeaux auction**

Hart Davis Hart's annual Celebration of Bordeaux auction in Chicago raised a recordbreaking total of more than US\$6.3m (£4.2m), just shy of the sale's high pre-sale estimate of \$6.7m (£4.4m). The company reported interest from hundreds of bidders from all over the world. The two-day auction featured more than 140 châteaux, spanning 62 vintages (see box, right).

#### Zachvs flash sale 'success'

Zachys said the sale claimed as the wine auction world's first 'flash auction' was a resounding success, with the five-hour sale in November realising US\$17,885 (£11,770), just above the high estimate, for a total of nine lots from Domaine de la Romanée-Conti, covering 12 bottles from 1993 and 1999. The top lot was a bottle of DRC. La Tâche 1993. which fetched US\$2,940 (£1,935).

#### Collector's corner

Graham's, 1972 **Single Harvest Port** £215 Hedonism, Bordeaux Index. Berry Bros & Rudd

The first wine of its kind selected for maturation by Peter Symington after the family's acquisition of Graham's in 1970. Some 60% of its volume has since evaporated.

Veuve Clicquot, La **Grande Dame 2006** £120 widely available Made from eight grands



Port Ellen. 32 Years Old £2,400 The Whisky Exchange

The 15th in an annual series of limited releases from this cult Islay distillery, which closed PORT ELLER in 1983. Huge, complexity of bonfire smoke and richness.

#### **Upcoming wine auctions**

Christie's, London, 10 December: Finest and Rarest Wines and Spirits; +44 (0)20 7839 9060 Bonhams, London, 10 December: Fine and Rare Wines; +44 (0)20 7468 5811

Sotheby's, London, 16 December: Finest and Rarest Wines; +44 (0)20 7293 5000

Sotheby's, New York, 4-5 December: The Don Stott Cellar Part II; +1 212 606 7050

Zachys, New York, 4-5 December: The Holiday Auction: +914 448 3026

Hart Davis Hart, Chicago, 11-12 December;

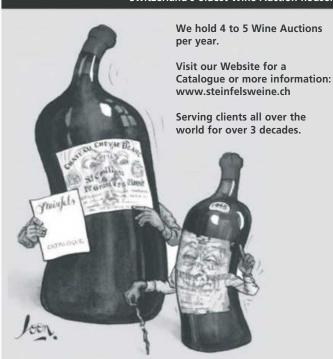
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**Wallys**, online, ends 13 December: +1 800 277 0387 Acker Merrall, New York, 17 December; +1845 268 6370

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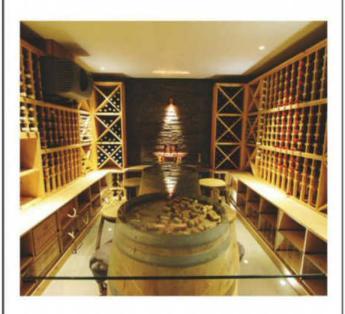


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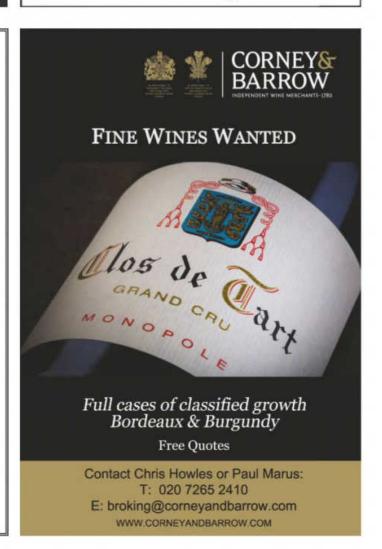
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## Decanter fine wine price watch

For a more comprehensive list of prices, visit Decanter.com

# Bordeaux prices

Red Bordeaux	1961	1966	1970	1975	1982	1983	1985	1986	1988	1989	1990	1995	
First Growths	£	£	£	£	£	£	£	£	£	£	£	£	
Lafite	8548	2699	2707	3490	19856	3163	5047	8266	4874	42841	4836	4827	
Latour	22912	3815	3936	2297	13310	2751	3179	3290	3374	3644	5206	4165	
Margaux Mouton-Rothschild	7658 11914	2324 3299	2219 1880	1906 2099	7809 8850	4221 2253	3126 2209	3956 6720	2624 2360	2673 2350	6842 2879	3800 3332	
Haut-Brion	14307	2924	1562	2099 2915	5249	2584	3513	3599	2806	10530	5004	3332	
		232 .	1002		02.10	2001	55.5	0000	2000	10000	5001		
Second Growths	075	C10	275	4.45	1405	701	000	F20	C7.4	022	11.4.4	C10	
Léoville-Barton Léoville-Poyferré	935 528	610 374	275 733	445 345	1425 1528	391 800	998 649	529 696	634 940	822 717	1144 2141	618 573	
Léoville-Las-Cases	3819	1500	1578	1100	2871	954	1716	2415	975	1050	1780	1324	
Pichon-Baron	3768	658	975	806	1451	658	748	768	825	1574	2221	818	
Pichon-Lalande	4222	1288	975	900	5099	1145	1299	1572	900	1333	940	1430	
Ducru-Beaucaillou	5962	1448	1016	825	2624	636	1118	1090	764	835	841	1208	
Cos d'Estournel Montrose	4024 3981	357.5 1296	600 1350	582 825	3191 1175	728 588	926 704	1080 675	915 646	1034 2999	1533 <b>4511</b>	1138 911	
Gruaud-Larose	5129	959	586	562	2737	712	822	1350	556	716	994	637	
Third Growths Palmer	18339	3959	2704	900	2116	2999	1351	1058	1310	2017	1798	1400	
Calon-Ségur	1454	6190	822	611	1387	331	524	529	637	1035	1265	1013	
	т	0.00		· · · · · ·			02 I	023		.000		.0.0	
Fourth Growths	1075	977	0.57	404	1750	E10	EOO	700	407	COF	670	EOF	
Beychevelle Talbot	1835 2563	440	953 437	<b>404</b> 473	1352 1904	518 594	588 575	769 1125	487 599	605 509	678 724	595 646	
	2303	770	73/	7/3	1504	334	313	1123	333	303	744	070	
Fifth Growths	7070	007	1071	705	0776		1775	000	075	0774	00.47	107.4	
Lynch-Bages Grand-Puy-Lacoste	3830 330	897 330	1231 402	765 598	2336 1949	<b>799</b> 352	1375 835	998 597	975 540	2774 764	2643 1399	1234 734	
Haut-Batailley	605	352	311	207	611	500	423	368	437	450	220	352	
Pontet-Canet	1012	180	345	345	881	368	308	403	479	487	728	663	
Médae Crus Baurmania													
Médoc Crus Bourgeois d'Angludet	210	95	165	121	445	299	337	325	316	311	329	187	
Gloria	264	360	286	286	814	196	368	334	382	298	400	440	
Chasse-Spleen	220	150	368	280	470	552	411	329	352	513	400	258	
Meyney	748	171	154	149	720	231	242	315	207	413	317	264	
Les Ormes-de-Pez	682	68	322	272	317	207	184	231	220	253	372 404	308	
Poujeaux Sociando-Mallet				198	340 528	150 327	264 582	230 450	270 319	282 517	562	302 404	
					320	327	302	430	313	317	302	404	
Pessac-Léognan	7.410	550	700	007	510		475	4.40	500	710	6.46	700	
Domaine de Chevalier Haut-Bailly	3410 913	552 598	799 460	293 956	519 492	517 447	475 529	449 322	529 305	712 564	646 809	382 446	
La Mission-Haut-Brion	16497	3069	1357	9898	6873	1935	2261	1406	1406	6679	3760	1770	
Pape Clément	3666	768	446	421	528	326	470	704	675	763	1275	697	
Smith-Haut-Lafitte	-	-	105	-	264	253	357.5	437	322	184	461	478	
St-Emilion													
Cheval Blanc	12300	1903	2968	2022	5943	3391	3755	2399	2350	2999	6768	3271	
Angélus	385	1058	920	598	1292	401.5	1240	1210	1375	2037	3280	2046	
Ausone	2427	1909	2662	1920	3205	1495	2445	2351	3042	2423	3391	4385	
Canon	1870 3525	396 1101	368 865	345 1700	1406 2040	625 1234	<b>540</b> 806	647 747	589 690	764 692	632 1350	299 847	
Figeac Pavie	2250	286	980	460	1458	668	846	916	299	881	1350	880	
Troplong-Mondot	-	-	378	345	823	-	-	446	470	1293	1998	644	
Domorol													
Pomerol Le Pin	_	_	_	_	57577	9400	12650	12075	13123	25850	28494	11766	
Pétrus	89280	11920	16659	11216	37600	12338	12747	14872	15142	24925	28200	13535	
Certan de May	-	-	529	-	1899	460	900	741	882	450	649	629	
Clinet	3525	-	-	220	528	286	451	633	474	4124	2143	1023	
La Conseillante	1595	-	1979	1819	2624	540	1645	650	859	2399	2949	1058	
L'Eglise Clinet L'Evangile	18198	1553	2668 <b>761</b>	2961 3797	1176 2122	690 1521	2362 1905	1127 805	999 576	1078 1143	1919 2099	1563 993	
Lafleur	- 18198	6748	11697	17096	23500	5881	7020	3680	2747	6341	11515	3116	
La Fleur-Pétrus	2860	682	700	1298	23300	839	828	923	1116	1831	1541	1454	
Latour à Pomerol	70503	-	682	1037	1498	728	460	276	450	692	780	686	
Trotanoy	-	2963	3829	6252	2892	1292	1351	808	827	1311	1758	1273	
Vieux Château Certan	6451	1933	483	1293	2891	518	729	1125	1054	940	1690	799	
Cautornes	1061	1062	1066	1067	1070	1071	1075	1076	1007	1005	1006	1000	
Sauternes	1961	1962	1966	1967	1970	1971	1975	1976	1983	1985	1986	1988	
	£	£	£	£	£	£	£	£	£	£	£	£	
Yquem	3771	4932	3091	11562	2022	3739	4197	3876	2804	2925	1782	2544	
Rieussec Coutet	605 1610	407 616	330	407 330	483 436	568 529	899 <b>381</b>	380 320	574 311	286 242	440 460	496 352	
Climens	680	1375	170	370	90	220	736	276	662	198	779	779	
Suduiraut	-	495	1108	2384	703	552	294	619	383	345	315	411	

Below are the latest case prices ( $12 \times 750$ ml bottles) reached at auction for the top wines of Bordeaux. The Index (below right) shows the average change on last month's prices

Liv-ex collects results from major auctions in the UK, US, Asia and Europe. All prices are in GBP and exclude sales tax. Auction results from outside the UK are converted to GBP at the spot rate on the day the auction took place. Prices include the buyer's premium where charged. The numbers in red indicate those prices which have changed since last month. Please note that some more recent vintages have yet to come up at auction, and thus no price is included.

#### Decanter Bordeaux Liv-ex Index

162.2 +3.0%
Index level at end of October 2015 (September 2007 = 100)



The Decanter Bordeaux Index is supplied by Liv-ex, and was rebased at 100 in August 2007. For details, go to Decanter.com/index

1996	1998	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2008	2009	2010	
£	£	£	£	£	£	£	£	£	£	£	First Growths
7728	4955	10412	4373	4373	6768	4373	6664	6247	6679	6768	Lafite
5900	2938	6554 6732	3332	3404	6247 4113	3332	5727 5639	3644 3124	8108 5249	10497 4935	Latour
4631 3435	3354 3106	11800	2957 2934	<b>2686</b> 2723	3332	<b>2707</b> 2831	3644	3124	4700	4935	Margaux Mouton-Rothschild
3083	2868	5206	2582	1780	2805	2707	5089	2915	4735	5998	Haut-Brion
		5200		.,					.,,,,	3333	
											Second Growths
705	564	989	517	566	782	513	625	424	651	900	Léoville-Barton
699	497	1038	564	423	1033	493	839	469	1290	1125	Léoville-Poyferré
<b>2050</b> 944	1116 858	<b>1933</b> 1515	1125 823	1075 587	1329 982	870 599	1794 <b>989</b>	822 782	1746 <b>1041</b>	1393 940	Léoville-Las-Cases Pichon-Baron
1652	1099	1438	871	679	978	779	884	715	954	1017	Pichon-Lalande
1469	740	1353	782	743	1169	914	1354	893	1998	1469	Ducru-Beaucaillou
1216	764	1354	826	781	1310	705	1249	565	1998	1907	Cos d'Estournel
891	763	1058	637	586	1351	600	940	856	1728	1410	Montrose
646	446	1031	445	396	355	341	400	353	625	677	Gruaud-Larose
											Third Crowtho
1645	1469	2043	1352	1290	917	1124	2233	1261	1776	1998	Third Growths Palmer
648	588	744	562	342	641	384	602	470	624	558	Calon-Ségur
040	300	,	302	342	041	304	002	470	024	330	culon segui
											Fourth Growths
730	588	857	646	634	510	611	682	517	543	614	Beychevelle
588	376	705	494	410	400	529	528	352	412	-	Talbot
											Fifth Growths
1081	1009	1506	881	866	1000	782	1121	790	1241	1197	Lynch-Bages
940	367	763	364	295	402	352	646	294	614	552	Grand-Puy-Lacoste
360	240	411	527	288	322	390	353	-	1234	-	Haut-Batailley
671	483	1145	406	480	718	445	890	729	1430	1357	Pontet-Canet
											Médoc Crus Bourgeois
244	_	257	172	172	188	196	_	_	_	_	d'Angludet
321	-	436	289	-	330	223	315	188	255	299	Gloria
280	400	306	141	211	256	206	353	-	213	294	Chasse-Spleen
135	-	279	-	-	166	150	225	-	305	-	Meyney
282	306	238	-	-	214	-	212	-	267	-	Les Ormes-de-Pez
235	306	251	-	-	206	150	226	242	255	-	Poujeaux
528	322	450	362	282	317	223	350	-	287	259	Sociando-Mallet
											Péssac-Leognan
539	446	470	391	363	353	306	470	282	513		Domaine de Chevalier
379	529	690	521	440	385	423	678	625	1023	729	Haut-Bailly
1502	2019	4855	1272	905	1263	938	3956	1251	4737	4749	La Mission-Haut-Brion
809	733	1052	799	588	646	581	1023	637	677	1028	Pape Clément
611	446	872	364	407	494	-	773	367	1458	750	Smith-Haut-Lafitte
											St-Emilion
2751	3179	5851	2518	2461	2403	2915	4443	2707	5114	5329	Cheval Blanc
1763	2153	3055	1880	1762	2232	1645	2707	1716	2585	1998	Angélus
2750	3525	7474	3619	2938	7066	2925	9787	4895	-	-	Ausone
368	368	552	-	322	-	308	574	-	-	977	Canon
733	998	1088	601	562	827	554	982	581	1264	1222	Figeac
646	1832	4038	1769	1515	1821	1247	2707	1514	2115	728	Pavie
453	679	993	487	353	470	387	1246	856	1125	822	Troplong-Mondot
											Domorol
15626	21572	43869	12137	10131	_	11115	16230	9870	20550	20994	Pomerol Le Pin
13535	21245	29743	15379	13769	15934	13188	21738	16995	21494	20994	Pétrus
411	707	501	382	-	400	306	650	535	573	677	Certan de May
739	662	1090	588	156	368	588	703	714	1880	1136	Clinet
1099	1011	1505	810	634	667	564	1208	-	1204	1275	La Conseillante
1009	2249	2625	1469	509	601	824	3449	1066	3149	2564	L'Eglise Clinet
787	1483	1841	716	705	564	705	1514	993	2207	1770	L'Evangile
2499	3497	13124	2804	2136	3702	2423	8329	10122	9371	9244	Lafleur
1035	1546	1574	1207	984	1092	1175	1272	1292	1612	1352	La Fleur-Pétrus
552	900	822	714	-	316	332	588	411	513	816	Latour à Pomerol
864	2755	1574	980	573	682	368	2046	1187	2134	1689	Trotanoy
784	1480	1158	1033	682	885	705	1249	764	2047	2137	Vieux Château Certan
1989	1990	1997	2001	2002	2004	2005	2007	2009	2010	2011	
£	£	£	£	£	£	£	£	£	£	£	First Growths
2461	2797	1528	4206	-		1939	1942	3520	-		Yquem
552	588	606	905	-	-	286	342	525	358	-	Rieussec
322 708	272 846	329 447	768 2221	-	-	540	309 1102	- 452	-	-	Coutet Climens
459	459	282	857	-	-	256	441	352	-		Suduiraut
733	733	202	037			230	741	JJZ			Judundut

## Decanter fine wine price watch

## Port

	1927	1934	1935	1945	1947	1948	1955	1960	1963	1966	1967
	£	£	£	£	£	£	£	£	£	£	£
Cockburn	5732	NS	6917	NS	506	NS	1265	598	646	NS	293.5
Croft	1150	NS	825	5076	1100	NS	1214	429	1058	1175	85
Dow	560	572	180	7520	638	NS	1485	598	1351	850	552
Fonseca	598	1595	NS	1980	NS	4180	1265	70	2639	1715	330
Graham	10191	6614	6614	6204	NS	3190	2145	417	1757	1262	NS
Quinta do Noval	420	440	NS	1600	2090	-	1383	1141	943	483	165
Sandeman	4234	2600	238	5187	792	400	2751	253	597	575	230
Taylor	1012	NS	1650	3630	NS	6659	2232	440	2445	920	160
Warre	750	616	NS	1430	396	600	1316	559	1383	863	414
	1970	1975	1977	1983	1985	1991	1994	1997	2000	2003	2007
	£	£	£	£	£	£	£	£	£	£	£
Cockburn	517	176	NS	572	587	253	327	207	229	-	-
Croft	470	288	494	220	207	143	345	-	259	-	-
Dow	690	352	677	542	363	449	384	317	455	-	-
Fonseca	1405	242	1010	587	447	180	884	444	329	400	-
Graham	937	207	535	367	494	446	582	339	306	411	-
Quinta do Noval	460	247	-	-	298	184	1035	1531	402	-	-
Sandeman	413	170	341	-	232	-	225	-	-	-	-
Taylor	921	437	704	734	329	-	1146	646	617	-	-
Warre	546	329	446	763	570	-	-	282	259	-	-

**PLEASE NOTE:** Fine Wine Price Watch features monthly prices for the most traded Bordeaux wines, and rotates coverage of Port, Burgundy and California. A wider selection is available at *Decanter.com*. Fine Wine Price Watch is not intended to predict future results of auction prices. Wine prices, and prices obtained at auction, can vary. Past performance is not indicative of future results.





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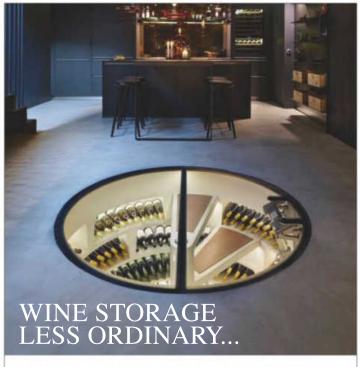
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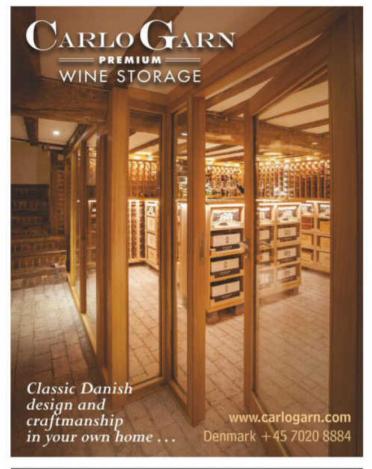
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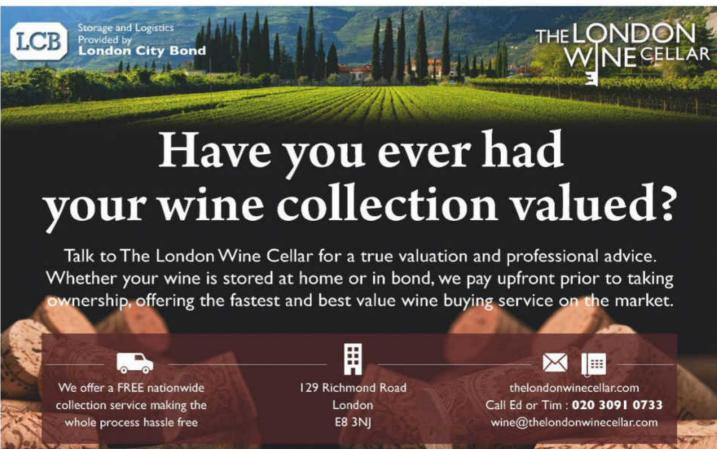
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## HM Borges, Terrantez 1862

## Madeira, Portugal

#### A legend because...

Michael Broadbent says the 1862 was not only the best vintage of Terrantez ever made but 'the greatest of all Madeiras'. Scarcity has always given wines from Terrantez a high reputation, but few examples have proved more persuasive than this. Given the near extinction of the variety in the 20th century, remaining bottles from the 19th century have been especially prized.

#### Looking back

This wine was not originally made by Borges as the firm was only founded in 1877, by Henrique Menezes Borges. Like other firms on the island, Borges bought up stocks of old wines from other companies and from private collectors – this Terrantez was sourced from TT De Camara Lomelino. One of Borges' activities was to supply other shippers with these wines, and many bottles of the 1862 are from stocks bought by the firm Leacock. The Borges company still exists and is run by the fourth generation of the founding family.

#### The vintage

In 1851 Madeira's vineyards were devastated by oidium (powdery mildew), which destroyed most of the island's vines. By the early 1860s the vineyards were just beginning to recover but production in 1862 was still very low.

#### The terroir

The vineyards from which this wine was made belonged to João Alexandrino Santos, but he owned many properties so the precise origin is not known. It was not unusual for wine companies to buy old stocks of finished wine, either to blend them or to age them further as vintage wines. This was no exception.

Terrantez, which combines high acidity with richness of fruit, is a tricky variety to grow, but was acclaimed in the 18th and 19th centuries as the source for some of the greatest Madeiras. It was originally grown near Lamego in the Douro valley but phylloxera led to its virtual disappearance, so 20th-century Terrantez wines are exceedingly rare. The variety is gradually being replanted, but it is unlikely that, even today, more than a few hectares are under vine.

## 'The greatest of all Madeiras' Michael Broadbent

#### The wine

Like all vintage Madeiras this would have spent decades in casks, subject to extremes of summer and winter temperatures to give an even oxidation. The wine would eventually be transferred to demijohns and bottled on demand, or at a slow pace so as to maintain stocks for decades. Borges' 1877 Terrantez was still in demijohns in 2014, but the 1862 was moved to demijohns in 1905, bottled in 1936.

#### The reaction

Michael Broadbent in 1994 recalled he had tasted the wine five times, noting 'an almost overwhelming bouquet and flavour, high toned, tangy, scented, power and delicacy magically combined... Sweeter than some Terrantez, with slight touch of singed caramel and chocolate'. Retasting the wine in 2010, he found his earlier note still valid. This was also

one of the very few wines to which he awarded 'At best six stars' in *Vintage Wine*.

Richard Mayson in his 2015 book *Madeira*, has a note from 2009: 'Like a good old amontillado but without the tang, candied peel with a touch of coffee and butterscotch; a slightly cask finish.'

Peter Reutter, reporting on a tasting in 2012 on *Madeirawineguide.com*, noted: 'Misleadingly harmonious at first, but quickly a bitter Terrantez backbone and lots of acidity burst through, together with caramel and hints of coffee.'

In his book on Madeira (2014 edition), Alex Liddell was captivated: 'Astonishingly full and assertive bouquet [of] candied peel, coconut and kiwi fruit; immensely weighty on the palate... but behind the opulence, a steely backbone of acidity; almost medicinally dry, with a bitter finish and length which goes on and on... Sensational. A giant among giants.'

#### THE FACTS

Bottles produced N/A
Blend 100% Terrantez
Yield N/A
Alcohol 20%
Release price N/A
Price today expect to pay at least £1,800
by Stephen Brook



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